Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān

One book, many meanings

Martin Whittingham

Culture and Civilization in the Middle East

Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān

Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān: One book, many meanings is the first work to focus entirely on the Qur'anic interpretation of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), a towering figure of Sunni Islam. Martin Whittingham explores both al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical methods and his interpretations of particular Qur'anic texts, and covers al-Ghazālī's mystical, legal and theological concerns.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I examines al-Ghazālī's legal and Sufi theoretical discussions. Part II asks how these theories relate to his practice, analysing the only three of al-Ghazālī's works which are centrally concerned with interpreting particular Qur'anic passages: *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān (The Jewels of the Qur'an), Al-Qisṭās al-mustaqim (The Correct Balance)* and *Mishkāt al-anwār (The Niche for Lights)*.

The book sets out systematically the nature of al-Ghazālī's dependence in *Mishkat al-anwār* on Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna). In addition, it illuminates the complex interactions of al-Ghazālī's mystical, legal and theological concerns. Tables are used to make as clear as possible al-Ghazālī's schemes of interpretation.

Providing a new point of access to the works of al-Ghazālī, this book will be welcomed by scholars and students of Islamic studies, religious studies, hermeneutics and anyone interested in how Muslims understand the Qur'an.

Martin Whittingham is currently working with Muslim-Christian Links, based in Edinburgh.

Culture and Civilization in the Middle East

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To
my parents, with love and gratitude

Contents

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Note on conventions used

Where dates are given in two forms, the first is the *Hijrī* date.

Transliteration follows the system of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* second edition, with the following modifications: *q* is used for *k* while *j* is used for *dj*. However, words or names with common Anglicised forms are spelt using these, including Qur'ān (except in titles of works, where it is fully transliterated), Muhammad or the modern writer Taha Hussein. References to Muslim traditions are as follows: 'Hadith' refers to the traditions collectively; 'hadith' refers to an individual tradition; 'hadiths' refers to several individual traditions.

Translations of Qur'anic passages are taken from Majid Fakhry (2000), *An Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Reading: Garnet) unless otherwise stated.

Abbreviations

AJISS	*American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*
ASP	*Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*
BRIIFS	*Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
EI2	*Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition)*
IC	*Islamic Culture*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
IJPR	*International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*
ILS	*Islamic Law and Society*
IQ	*Islamic Quarterly*
IS	*Islamic Studies*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*
JHP	*Journal of the History of Philosophy*
JIS	*Journal of Islamic Studies*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
MIDEO	*Mélanges d'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales*
MW	*Muslim World*
REI	*Revue des Etudes Islamiques*
SI	*Studia Islamica*
ZGAIW	*Zeitschrift für Geschichte Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften*

Introduction

> Truly speaking, the entire history of Islam is one of exegesis of the Qur'an; and it is only by viewing the entire history of Islam in its relation to the Qur'an that we can attain any unity of perspective on that history. All other ways of viewing that history will present a disjointed and fragmentary picture.
>
> (Rahbar 1962:298)

How does one of the towering figures of Islamic thought approach the Qur'an? It is a curious phenomenon that despite the great fame of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (450–505/1058–1111), the present work is, to my knowledge, the first book devoted solely to examining his scriptural interpretation. It examines both his hermeneutical theories and his actual interpretations of the Qur'an, paying particular attention to his understanding of *ta'wīl,* a term which can be translated as 'interpretation', but which has a range of nuances in al-Ghazālī's works.

Debates have occurred throughout the history of Islam over which texts should be taken literally, and which should be understood metaphorically, allegorically, on several levels simultaneously or using some other formulation. In fact such debates are inevitable in a tradition placing such great emphasis on its scripture. Hence the hermeneutical issues explored in the present work underlie not only the specific topics discussed, but also shed light more generally on some of the methods by which Muslim scholars defend their views and criticise others.

Aims and scope

Part I of the present work seeks to illumine al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical theories, exploring possible influences on them and the underlying concerns which shaped their formation. Part II turns to al-Ghazālī's interpretations of actual texts. The relation of these interpretations to al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical theories will be probed, along with the nature of the subjects forming the most prominent concerns of his Qur'an interpretation and possible influences on his interpretations. Both parts together aim to form a more accurate picture than previously established of what al-Ghazālī means by his use of the term *ta'wīl*.

As for the scope of this study, a range of works from al-Ghazālī's extensive corpus is examined, drawn from texts of undisputed authenticity. There are two notable casualties of this focus on undisputed texts. One is *Qānūn al-ta'wīl (The Canon of Interpretation)* ([Pseudo?]-Ghazālī 1940), sections of which may well be authentic. However, the work when taken as a whole exhibits features highly uncharacteristic of al-Ghazālī, notably a

disorderly structure and a self-effacing comment acknowledging limitations in the author's knowledge of the science of hadith ([Pseudo?]-Ghazālī 1940:16).[1] The second work to be passed over is *al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhiyat 'Īsa bi-ṣarīḥ al-injīl (The Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus from the evidence of the Gospel)*. This contains hermeneutical discussion (see [Pseudo?]-Ghazālī 1939:7–8), but again there are significant reasons for doubting its authenticity (Reynolds 1999:49–54).

The texts analysed in the present study are explored in chronological order of composition within either Part I or II, insofar as this can be ascertained. In Part I all of al-Ghazālī's theoretical discussions of *ta'wīl* are analysed, beginning with *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna'l-islām wa'l-zandaqa (The Clear Criterion for distinguishing between Islam and Godlessness)* and moving on to *al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-Uṣūl (The Essential Theory of Legal Thought)*.[2] Following this, Chapter 3 explores four Sufi-influenced discussions of *ta'wīl* which occur in four sources. These are Book VIII of al-Ghazālī's most famous work, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences),* entitled *Kitāb Ādāb tilāwat al-Qur'ān (The Book of Rules for Reciting the Qur'an), Jawāhir al-Qur'an (The Jewels of the Qur'an), Mishkāt al-anwār (The Niche for Lights)* and Book II of *Iḥyā'*, entitled *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aqā'id (The Foundations of the Articles of Faith)*. Details of all these works are given in the relevant chapters.

The organising principle in approaching the theories discussed in Part I is al-Ghazālī's distinction between two different types of non-literal interpretation. These relate to legal and Sufi thought respectively. In *Kitāb al-'Ilm (The Book of Knowledge),* the opening book of *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn,* al-Ghazālī discusses four categories of praiseworthy sciences. He terms the second category the branches *(furū')*. These branches are inferences drawn from the sources *(uṣūl)*:

> Not according to the literal meaning *(mawjib al-alfāẓ)* but through meanings *(ma'ān)* which are adduced by the mind… This last thing may be of two kinds: the first pertains to the activities of this world and is contained in the books of law and entrusted to the lawyers, the learned men of this world; the second pertains to the activities of the hereafter. It is the science of the conditions of the heart… All these [the conditions] are treated in the last part of this book [i.e. the fourth quarter of the *Iḥyā'*].
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:17; tr. 31–2)

So the activities of this world here include discerning the meanings of texts in a legal context, while the activities of the hereafter refer to the same activity in a Sufi context. It is for this reason that the first two chapters of Part I of the present study, analysing texts with predominantly legal concerns, bear the title 'the activities of this world' while the third, dealing with texts shaped by Sufi concerns, is entitled 'the activities of the hereafter'.

This distinction is not intended to correlate with aspects of al-Ghazālī's remark in *Mīzān al-'amal (The Criterion of Action)* regarding three levels of teaching (al-Ghazālī 1964c:406). Here he distinguishes teachings one presents in controversies, those

mentioned during sessions of teaching and instruction and third those which you believe within your own soul. Unsurprisingly, al-Ghazālī nowhere classifies his own works along these lines, and there is no scholarly consensus about which if any of his works might belong to the third category. As the ensuing study will aim to show, al-Ghazālī can intermingle statements about the possibility of hidden meanings and spiritual secrets with discussion of what can be termed exoteric subjects, and the possibility remains that none of his extant works belong in his third category. His intriguing remarks in *Mīzān,* therefore, do not serve as a basis for categorising his hermeneutical thought.

Part II of the present work does not aim to offer the same comprehensiveness as Part I, since it is not possible to survey the vast number of interpretations, often brief, in al-Ghazālī's works. Instead, a chapter is devoted to each of the only three texts by al-Ghazālī in which he makes Qur'anic interpretation his primary concern or shaping principle. These three, two of which have already been mentioned, are *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān,* *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm (The Correct Balance)* and *Mishkāt al-anwār.* This selection means that while two books from *Iḥyā'* are discussed in Part I, al-Ghazālī's most famous work does not receive attention in Part II. This is because none of the books of *Iḥyā'* concentrates on the Qur'an in the same way as the three under discussion, and while a survey of the interpretation of the Qur'an in *Iḥyā'* would be a valuable undertaking in its own right, the scale and focus of such an undertaking would require a separate study.

Tidy distinctions aid clarity, but often prove vulnerable under close scrutiny, and two such distinctions central to the structure of the present study require comment. The first is the division of hermeneutical theory and practice in al-Ghazālī's works. In the works themselves this is not an absolute separation, since at times al-Ghazālī will illustrate a theory with examples of interpretation, while at other times theoretical comment will enter into his exploration of an actual text. The second necessary distinction concerns the division of the chapters in Part I into the affairs of this world and of the hereafter. The discussion itself makes clear that such a classification does not fully reflect the complexity of al-Ghazālī's writing. The division of theory and practice, and of texts as Sufi-influenced or not, is used to organise the study according to the dominant aspect of the material under discussion. This is not to deny that other strands or elements may also be present in any given text.

What should be the nature of an enquiry into hermeneutics? This study is historical, since discussion of how the Qur'an *should* be interpreted, a generally prescriptive approach, can be illuminated by the descriptive activity of exploring how it *was* interpreted by those who previously undertook the task. However, understanding of the ways in which hermeneutical judgments are arrived at has recently bifurcated.[3] The first of these understandings, and the only one until recent times, presupposes that authorial intention is of primary importance. Embedded in a text, this intention can be extracted by an interpreter largely unaltered, language being a sufficiently stable medium to make such communication possible. Since meaning can be thus reliably conveyed, the important hermeneutical questions concern how to gain access to that meaning. Study of the hermeneutics of particular interpreters therefore involves examining the principles they employ in attempting to uncover a stable core of meaning.

The second approach is fundamentally different, involving reflection on the process of understanding itself. This approach challenges the assumption that meaning can be embedded in a text without the author losing control over how it is received. Instead, the role of the interpreter rather than the author is highlighted. The notion of a text as an object to be analysed and dissected by a detached subject is rejected as a misunderstanding of the interpretive process (Palmer 1981:5–7). Instead, profoundly influenced by his or her context, including social, political and intellectual factors, the interpreter inevitably constructs or adds to meaning in the very act of interpretation, whether consciously or not. The role of authorial intention is consequently partially or wholly displaced. This focus on the interpreter and the act of interpretation is regarded as liberating texts to interact more dynamically with changing circumstances and consequently enabling them to become a richer resource. This approach 'is not a competing form of methodological hermeneutics—a superior *method* of exegesis—but a body of critical reflection about the event of understanding' (Palmer 1981:32). While not prominent in recent hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'an, one example is Farid Esack, who, in his *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective,* comments that, 'all readings of any text are necessarily contextual' (Esack 1997:225). The work of Mohammad Arkoun, to be discussed shortly, is also important in this regard, as is that of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (on whom see Kermani 2004).

The study of the hermeneutical methods of a historical figure such as al-Ghazālī connects with both of these views of what constitutes hermeneutical enquiry. It is stating the obvious to note that al-Ghazālī was convinced of the divine authorship of the Qur'an and of the primacy and authority of authorial intention in conveying meaning:

> It is not allowable to apply the Word of God Most High except to what God Most High intended, but the saying of a poet is allowable to apply to other things besides what the poet meant. So in it is the danger of disliking or of erroneous interpretation *(ta'wīl)* to suit the state, while on the other hand it is incumbent to reverence the Word of God and to guard it from such danger.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: II:297; tr. 1899:744–5, adapted)

Al-Ghazālī was, then, concerned to outline what he considered appropriate ways of interpreting the Qur'an in the light of the authority it possesses over the reader. Examining al-Ghazālī's responses to a text which he regards as authoritative need not be useful only to those who accept his assumption that meaning is recoverable and authorial intention discernible. Such an exercise also has value for the second understanding of hermeneutics outlined earlier. To adopt Palmer's phrase, one way of contributing to our own 'critical reflection about the event of understanding' is to analyse how another interpreter has experienced that event, and in what ways their context and experiences influence their understanding. As Rippin notes, 'It is precisely through the exegetical works that we can establish a history of reader reaction to the Qur'an' (Rippin 1988:4). So in reflecting on al-Ghazālī's reaction to the Qur'an, we may also become more aware of our own reactions and the influences on them. Furthermore, the question also arises as to whether al-Ghazālī, regardless of his own views of the authority of the text, in fact mainly constructs his own meanings, as many modern writers on hermeneutics insist is

inevitable given the very nature of the interpretive process. After setting out in the ensuing chapters what meanings he finds in the Qur'an, this question will be addressed in the conclusion of this work.

Important terminology

As a prelude to understanding al-Ghazālī's approach to *ta'wīl* it is useful to trace developments in the understanding both of this term, and also of the understanding of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, a pair of terms with which it is closely associated. *Ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* can be translated as 'literal and allegorical', 'exoteric and esoteric', 'outer and inner' or 'apparent and hidden'. They or their cognates occur together in the Qur'an on five occasions, though not in the context of textual interpretation: 6:120, 6:150 and 7:33 refer to open and secret sins, 31:20 refers to God's blessings, while 57:3 refers to God himself, described as 'the Outer and the Inner'.

Ẓāhir and *bāṭin* came to embody the view that a text has dual aspects, though these aspects could be regarded as being either in conflict or complementary. In the exoteric tradition *ẓāhir* was understood in one of two ways. It could signify the literal meaning of a text not susceptible to any other interpretation. This is the understanding of Dawūd b. 'Alī al-Ẓāhirī and Ibn Ḥazm. Alternatively, *ẓāhir* could denote the most likely of several possible meanings, a view held by al-Shāfi'ī (Goldziher 1971:24). Weiss, following the second of these understandings, rejects the translation of *Ẓāhir* as 'literal' (Weiss 1992:138–41). He argues that the term should be rendered in two different ways according to its precise application. When applied to an expression, it should be translated as 'univocal', since, unlike an ambiguous *(mujmal)* expression, which might have several equally probable literal meanings, a *ẓāhir* expression is distinguished by the preponderance of one meaning as the most probable intended meaning. When applied to meaning, Weiss prefers to translate *ẓāhir* as 'apparent', since this likewise emphasises the term's denoting a single, most probable meaning from a range of possible meanings, rather than the fact that the meaning involved is literal. Following Weiss, the translation 'apparent' rather than 'literal' will be adopted in the present work for a meaning which is *ẓāhir*. In the exoteric tradition, the *bāṭin* is the product of figurative interpretation and does not involve Sufi insights.

In the esoteric tradition, while *ẓāhir* denotes the apparent meaning of the text, *bāṭin* signifies a concealed or mystical meaning accessible only to the initiated. There are many understandings of how this inner meaning might be accessed (see, for example, Böwering 1980). The important point here is that it is not simply metaphorical interpretation guided by linguistic and contextual factors, but a hidden meaning requiring spiritual insight. More on this will be said in the course of the ensuing study.

The term *ta'wīl* occurs 17 times in the Qur'an. Eight of these occurrences are in Sura 12 (6, 21, 36, 37, 44, 45, 100, 101) where the word signifies dream interpretation, while Wansbrough argues that the other references signify 'outcome/sequel' (Wansbrough 1977:157). In post-Qur'anic usage the term has been understood in a variety of ways.

Early general use signified not interpretation but the Qur'an's 'applicability to religious and social practices' (Versteegh 1993:63). However, a historical shift occurred:

> From an almost neutral description of rational, as contrasted with traditional, interpretation, *ta'wīl* became first a collective expression for all save literal exegesis (*ẓāhir*), and finally an epithet of abuse for irresponsible, as contrasted with 'respectable' scriptural exegesis *(tafsīr)*.
>
> (Wansbrough 1977:244)

In Sufi thought *ta'wīl* has always been important. It is frequently noted that the term is associated with return *(awwal)* to the origin, and various English translations have been suggested, including 'spiritual exegesis' (Corbin 1960:28),[4] 'disallegorization' or 'bringing back to a higher plane' (see Keddie 1963:55). Chittick rightly notes concerning *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr* that, 'The history of these two terms and their interrelationship is one of the many monographs on Islamic thought waiting to be written' (Chittick 1989:199).

The life and works of al-Ghazālī

Al-Ghazālī was variously legal scholar, Ash'arite theologian,[5] and writer on Sufism and also had a strong interest in aspects of philosophy, notably logic. He left his own account of his life, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* ('The Deliverer from Error') (al-Ghazālī 1959).[6] There are numerous other biographical studies, the earliest being that of 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (d. 529/1129) (al-Fārisī 1960:41–8; more recently, see Macdonald 1899:71–132; Smith 1944; Watt 1963 and the recent valuable discussion in *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* X:358–77).

Born in Tus in Khurasan, in what is now North Eastern Iran, in 450/1058, al-Ghazālī studied under the theologian al-Juwaynī in Nishapur until the latter's death in 478/1085. He then moved to Baghdad, becoming part of the circle identified with the powerful Seljuk vizier Niẓām al-Mulk, who in 484/1091 appointed him teacher at the madrasa or college which he had founded in the city. Here he enjoyed notable public success. Al-Fārisī states that 'His rank and entourage in Baghdad became so great that it surpassed the entourage of the notables and the princes and the residence of the Caliph' (al-Fārisī 1960:43; trans, xvi). After 4 years, however, al-Ghazālī suddenly left Baghdad in 488/1095, spending the following 11 years in travel, retreat and writing. By his own account (see al-Ghazālī 1959) his departure was precipitated by a spiritual crisis leading him to embrace the Sufi life. In 499/1106 he returned to teaching at Nishapur, eventually withdrawing once more to Tus, where he died on 14 Jumada II 505/18 December 1111.

Al-Ghazālī's prolific output has given rise to two ongoing topics of debate, the chronology and authenticity of books attributed to him. There is no final word on these topics, but useful studies have been offered, with new evidence sometimes emerging. (On chronology see Bouyges 1959; Hourani 1984; on authenticity see notably Pourjavady 2002, and other studies mentioned in the course of the present work). Al-Ghazālī's most famous work is *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)* (al-Ghazālī n.d.; see the summary in *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* X:363–9). This consists of 40 separate

books, in 4 parts of 10 books each. *Iḥyā'* deals with devotional and ethical matters, and moves towards a Sufi-oriented exposition of the temptations besetting the believer and the path towards overcoming them. Al-Ghazālī also produced, however, works on jurisprudence, theology *(kalām),* anti-Ismā'īlī polemic (see Mitha 2001) and works combating or summarising the work of Islamic philosophers, most famously *Tahāfut al-falāsifa (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)* (al-Ghazālī 1997).

The claim has often been made that al-Ghazālī's career was significant in uniting Sufism and 'orthodox' Islam. However, caution is needed here, as recently noted by Berkey (2003:231–6). As Malamud comments:

> The Sufism he described had been cultivated and elaborated in the 10th and 11th centuries by a number of urban religious scholars and Sufis, many of them from Khurasan. Moreover, Sufism was integrated into the fabric of Islamic social and communal life well before the 12th and 13th centuries. In late 10th- and 11th-century Khurasan, Sufi organizations and structures of authority were closely connected with those of the ulema.
>
> (Malamud 1994:427)

It is important not to bow too low to the 'great man' theory of history. Rarely does one individual, however significant or revered, single-handedly unite two such long-established trends, although al-Ghazālī no doubt aided the coming together of Sufism and theology by his example and writing. However, what is not in doubt is the status which al-Ghazālī enjoyed in subsequent years, although he also had his detractors (Ormsby 1984:131–4).

Recent studies of al-Ghazālī

Discussion of al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics is not extensive in comparison with the attention paid to other aspects of his work, and the most significant discussions of this topic are referred to in the course of the present study. However, scholarship on al-Ghazālī is copious, and a number of recent works show that there is no sign of interest abating. Frank has produced two books exploring a question which will emerge periodically in the present study, the nature of the relationship between the thought of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) (Frank 1992, 1994). In particular, does the degree to which al-Ghazālī absorbed the ideas of Ibn Sīnā, a writer he is more famous for opposing, reveal that al-Ghazālī was, in certain respects, not in fact an Ash'arite theologian? Frank adopts this view, and the saga of al-Ghazālī's intellectual debts to Ibn Sīnā and their implications surfaces regularly in the present work.[7]

There has also been recent discussion of al-Ghazālī's understanding of divine love (Abrahamov 2003:42–86) and of his doctrine of the soul (Gianotti 2001). Mitha discusses al-Ghazālī's criticisms of the Ismā'īlīs (Mitha 2001), while Griffel explores his treatment of the issue of apostasy (Griffel 2000:260–335). These studies naturally engage at times in discussion of al-Ghazālī's treatment of particular Qur'anic texts, but since their primary interests lie elsewhere they do not employ hermeneutics as their foundation.

One writer on al-Ghazālī questions the way in which such studies of a historical thinker are conducted. Mohammed Arkoun strongly opposes any approach to a writer which analyses his thought in isolation from that individual's role as a member of a wider society (Arkoun 1970:59). Since the present study raises questions of al-Ghazālī's sincerity and intellectual development it is useful here to engage with Arkoun's view, expressed in relation to al-Ghazālī, that such questions are simply products of an essentialist approach, while the true importance of any author emerges from considering them as a product of their age (Arkoun 1970:59). Arkoun's approach derives from his emphasis on the need for structural anthropology to inform Islamic studies. In his view any mediation of God is radically context-relative. 'There is no way to find the absolute outside the social, political condition of human beings and the mediation of language' (Arkoun 1988:81).

However, it is debatable whether the historical conditioning of a sacred text entirely defines the limits of its potential to enable people to, 'find the absolute'. Language could also, for example, be regarded as yielding knowledge of the transcendent which, while not complete, is nonetheless sufficient to bear the weight of the claims made by a theistic understanding. Arkoun regards previous Qur'anic interpretation as using the text as a pre-text. Yet Arkoun himself refers to 'critical objective knowledge' which is the product of what he terms 'the new rationality' (Arkoun 1988:85, 88). This 'objective knowledge' is apparently attained through profound awareness of the historically conditioned nature of texts and their interpretations. Esack notes that Arkoun seems to imply, 'that there can be a class of "super readers," expert historians or linguists who will be able to access the true meaning of a text' (Esack 1997:73). Such a position is only a more extreme version of the widespread recognition that understanding contextual factors relating to scriptural texts helps the interpreter to avoid his interpretation being unwittingly but fatally bound by his or her own context. Arkoun's method appears thus to be not so much a new approach as an intensification of the existing attention paid to contextual factors, with the same ultimate goal of finding the 'true meaning', or at least of drawing as near to it as possible. Detailed exploration of the issues raised here is beyond the scope of this study. The important point for our purposes is that questions of sincerity, intellectual development and historical context are all fruitful areas of enquiry, and will all therefore feature in what follows.

In the course of this enquiry a number of important issues are tackled, including al-Ghazālī's understanding of unbelief and apostasy, prophecy, the nature of the rewards of Paradise, the relation of revelation and reason and how to attain certain knowledge. These are all approached, however, through the Qur'anic filter already mentioned, probing what texts and interpretations al-Ghazālī brings to the fore when dealing with such questions. Hence Rahbar's words, quoted at the start of this introduction, prompt us to ask to what extent looking at a Muslim writer's work through this Qur'anic filter yields clearer understanding of his thought. We shall return to this question at the close.

Al-Ghazālī consistently takes the view that no-one should attempt to grasp hidden or inner meanings until they have made the effort properly to understand more exoteric matters.

> One who claims to possess understanding of the deep meanings of the Qur’ān, without being prudent at its outward exegesis, is comparable to a man who claims to reach the upper part of a house without crossing its door, or claims to understand the purposes of the Turks when he does not understand the language of the Turks.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:292; tr. 94)

Following the thrust of this warning, this study, before moving on to apparently esoteric matters, opens with two chapters discussing some of the hermeneutical issues relating to ‘the activities of this world’. The first of these chapters addresses *Fayṣal al-tafriqa*.

Part I
Al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical theories

1
‘The activities of this world’ (I)
Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna’l-Islām wa’l-zandaqa

Introduction

The work in which al-Ghazālī focuses most consistently on the question of *ta’wīl is Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna’l-Islām wa’l-zandaqa* (al-Ghazālī 1961). The title of this work can be translated as *The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Between Islam and Godlessness*. Jackson, whose recent translation is used unless otherwise indicated, suggests rendering it as ‘The Decisive Criterion for distinguishing acceptable interpretation from the attempt to conceal unbelief in interpretation’ (Jackson, introduction to his translation: 56). Although the concerns of this work concerning *ta’wīl* are found in some of al-Ghazālī’s previous writings, notably *Faḍā’iḥ, Iqtiṣād* and *Tahāfut,* as discussed later, *Fayṣal* is unique amongst his works in its persistent focus on the issue. It is therefore a fitting text with which to begin this enquiry into al-Ghazālī’s understandings of Qur’anic interpretation. In the course of discussing hermeneutics, al-Ghazālī raises questions regarding unbelief and apostasy, and makes interesting comments on the status of non-Muslims. Hence this text has at its heart some of the most fundamental questions regarding what constitutes right and wrong belief and how the two are to be distinguished.

Following a preliminary discussion of the text, five questions will be explored. First, what is the significance of al-Ghazālī’s linking unbelief to denial of the words of Muhammad? Second, why does he provide in *Fayṣal* such a particularly sustained treatment of *ta’wil*? Third, how seriously are the details of the elaborate frameworks in *Fayṣal* to be taken? Fourth, what are the implications of al-Ghazālī’s making the decision to resort to *ta’wīl* dependent on an understanding of syllogistic logic? Finally, does the term *ta’wīl* always denote a process of interpretation as is commonly assumed?

Al-Ghazālī’s choice of the term *zandaqa* (‘godlessness’) in his title needs comment. Jackson argues that for al-Ghazālī this term emphasises not only outright rejection of the existence of God, but concealed unbelief which masquerades as belief (Jackson, introduction to translation: 56). Al-Ghazālī’s main interest in *Fayṣal* is in the second of these, not least because it relates to the use of *ta’wīl*—it is possible to conceal unbelief beneath the claim that any given view is just a different interpretation of the sources. Al-Ghazālī’s primary target in making this charge is the Islamic philosophers, who believe in God but often use figurative interpretation illegitimately to conceal their actual disbelief in such ideas as the resurrection of the body and God’s knowledge of particulars

(Jackson, introduction to translation: 57). So it is the use of *ta'wīl* to conceal unbelief which is in focus in the use of *zandaqa*. This is borne out by al-Ghazālī's discussion of the right understanding of the hadith, 'My community will divide into over seventy sects; all of them will enter Paradise except the *zanādiqa*' (al-Ghazālī 1961:193; tr. 111, retaining *zanādiqa* here in place of Jackson's 'Crypto-infidels'). Al-Ghazālī states that the hadith cannot mean by *zanādiqa* those who categorically deny the prophethood of Muhammad, the resurrection or God's existence, since such people would not be part of the Muslim community at all. Instead the reference must be to those who affirm the afterlife but interpret its rewards and punishments entirely metaphorically, and also affirm God's existence while limiting the scope of his knowledge of particulars. These are two of al-Ghazālī's three principal criticisms of the philosophers in *Tahāfut,* the third being their assertion of the pre-eternity of the world (al-Ghazālī 1997:230).

However, as Mustapha notes in the introduction to his French translation of *Fayṣal,* while al-Ghazālī chooses *zandaqa* for his title, instances of the use of *kufr* and its derivatives outnumber those of *zandaqa* in the text by more than 10 to 1 (Mustapha, translator's introduction: 66, 68). Regarding the attribution of the term *kufr,* al-Ghazālī writes that 'Now, there are explicit texts regarding the (status of) Jews and Christians. Deists, Dualists, Crypto-infidels *(al-zanādiqa),* and Atheists are assigned the same status on *a fortiori* grounds' (al-Ghazālī 1961:174; tr. 92). In addition, *zandaqa* can be equated with *kufr*. Defaming the Prophet and the trustworthiness of his transmission of God's revelation is called, 'pure *kufr* and *zandaqa*' (al-Ghazālī 1961:184; cf. tr. 101). Hence the use of the term *zandaqa,* as distinct from *kufr,* appears to be of limited significance.

While the focus of the present work is on Qur'anic hermeneutics, al-Ghazālī's discussion of *ta'wīl* in *Fayṣal* draws on both the Qur'an and Hadith, as does his discussion in *Mustaṣfā,* the subject of Chapter 2. Al-Ghazālī's discussions of particular hadiths can be included in a discussion primarily treating his attitude to *ta'wīl* of the Qur'an, since he treats both sources comparably in his discussion. Indeed, he makes clear, at the outset of the section of *Mustaṣfā* devoted to the Sunna, that both are part of *waḥy,* or revelation. 'He [Muhammad] did not speak on caprice. It was but revelation (*waḥy*) revealed to him. But a part of the revelation is recited, and is therefore called the Book, and a part is not recited, and this is the Sunna' (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:129; tr. 541). The term 'scriptural hermeneutics' therefore best describes the focus of this chapter and the next.

No definite date can be given for the composition of *Fayṣal.* The most detailed discussion of the issue is given by Griffel in introducing his German translation of the work (Griffel, translator's introduction: 43–6). He argues for a date of perhaps 1106–1109, later than the ascription given by Hourani, who assumes that the work comes from al-Ghazālī's long period of retirement from 48 8/1095–499/1106 (Hourani 1984:300). *Fayṣal* mentions *Qisṭās* (al-Ghazālī 1961:188; tr. 106) and is mentioned in *Munqidh* (al-Ghazālī 1959:24; tr. 77), so it must fall between the composition of these two texts.

Al-Ghazālī offers no explicit statement of the overall purpose of *Fayṣal,* but its twin aims are readily apparent. These are, on the one hand, to establish a definition of unbelief *(kufr),* and second, to determine the extent and limits of acceptable *ta'wīl*. The issues of

kufr and *ta'wīl* are closely linked for al-Ghazālī since unbelievers are defined in *Fayṣal* as those who go beyond acceptable limits of interpretation. A proper understanding of *ta'wīl* therefore provides the safety barrier preventing someone straying into downright unbelief. Al-Ghazālī's principal aim is to argue for liberty in interpretation, and tolerance towards those who interpret, as long as the process follows a clearly defined procedure. *Fayṣal* seeks to outline this procedure.

The dominant approach in *Fayṣal* to these questions of unbelief and *ta'wīl,* as stated by al-Ghazālī, is legal.

> 'Unbelief' is a legal designation *(ḥukm shar'ī),* like slavery and freedom, its implication being the licitness of shedding the blood of one (so designated) and passing a judgement upon him to the effect that he will dwell in the Hellfire forever. And since this is a legal designation, it can only be known on the basis of either an explicit text from scripture *(naṣṣ)* or an analogy *(qiyās)* drawn from an explicit text.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1961:134; tr. 92)

Approaching the question of *kufr* as a legal category, rather than merely listing unacceptable beliefs, is a new departure in the history of Islamic theology (Griffel 2000:307). However it is only new for al-Ghazālī to the extent that he concentrates single-mindedly on the issue, and the concerns of *Fayṣal* can be traced back to three other works. In *Faḍā'iḥ al-Mustaẓhiriyya* (al-Ghazālī 1383:146–68; tr. 265–74), al-Ghazālī's polemic against the Ismā'īlīs dating from 487/1094, he distinguishes Ismā'īlī beliefs which are classed as error from more serious unbelief.[1] Al-Ghazālī states that 'It would take a volume to treat even summarily what necessitates unbelief and "excommunication"—so let us restrict ourselves in this book to what is important' (al-Ghazālī 1383:151; tr. 266). *Fayṣal* can be regarded as that volume.

Second, in the conclusion to his famous work *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* ('The Incoherence of the Philosophers') he states that he refrains from going into exactly what constitutes infidelity as this would take him away from his topic (al-Ghazālī 1997:230), although, as already noted, he famously outlines three issues on which the philosophers are to be counted as unbelievers. Third, his work of *kalām, Iqtiṣād fi'l-I'tiqād ('The Golden Mean in Belief'*—al-Ghazālī 1962), which can be seen as the sequel to *Tahāfut* (Marmura 1989:50), fittingly picks up this topic again. Its final section begins to explore the legal positions regarding unbelief (al-Ghazālī 1962:246–56). This discussion also mentions interpretation, stating that errors in *ta'wīl* should not lead necessarily lead to charging with unbelief (al-Ghazālī 1962:251). Since *Iqtiṣād* dates from 488/1095, it is clear that *Fayṣal* brings into full focus a legal approach to the question of unbelief which had been in al-Ghazālī's mind for some years.

Brief comment is needed on the occasional use of Sufi language and cosmological terms in *Fayṣal,* particularly as it is introduced in the present work under the category of 'the activities of this world'. The text is not primarily Sufi in orientation despite the occasional occurrence of Sufi terminology The use of language which lends a Sufi

flavour includes the description of the overall topic of the work, the question of the attribution of unbelief, as an aspect of the *asrār al-malakūt* ('hidden truths of the immaterial world' (al-Ghazālī 1961:129; tr. 87). Furthermore, in criticising *kalām* al-Ghazālī states that, 'faith in God comes rather of a light which God casts into the hearts of His servants' (al-Ghazālī 1961:202; tr. 121) and describes true faith as being accompanied by worship and remembrance of God *(dhikr)* until there are revealed to him the lights of knowledge *(ma'rifa)* (al-Ghazālī 1961:204; tr. 124). He also asserts that 'people of spiritual insight' *(ahl al-baṣā'ir)* have learnt of God's mercy, 'through various means and illuminations *(asbāb wa mukāshafāt)* other than the reports and anecdotes *(al-khabār wa'l-athār)* which have come into their possession' (al-Ghazālī 1961:208; tr. 129). There is also a brief parallel in *Fayṣal* to the interpretation of the famous Light Verse of the Qur'an (Q24:35) which al-Ghazālī presents in *Mishkāt,* discussed in Chapter 6 (al-Ghazālī 1961:129; tr. 87). It is presumably such terminology which leads Jabre to regard *Fayṣal* as sharing the same hermeneutical approach as the more Sufi *Ādāb tilāwat,* Book VIII of *Iḥyā',* discussed in Chapter 3 (Jabre 1970:18).

There is, however, good reason to distinguish the hermeneutical foundations of these two works. The Sufi terms do not influence the hermeneutics of *Fayṣal.* Hermeneutically speaking, reason, specifically syllogistic logic, lies at the centre of al-Ghazālī's arguments in *Fayṣal.* In this context it is interesting to note that Lazarus-Yafeh (1975:362) regards *Fayṣal* as written for a wider audience, while *Mishkāt* is written for an inner circle, yet Griffel (2000:334) reaches the opposite conclusion. It seems difficult to pin down the intended audience of *Fayṣal,* though more is said on the underlying purpose of the work below. This is a good example of the difficulty of using al-Ghazālī's discussion of levels of sincerity of texts in *Mīzān* (al-Ghazālī 1964c:405ff.) as a key to his works. As noted in the Introduction, above, without consensus over which works, if any, reveal al-Ghazālī's innermost beliefs, the disclosure in *Mīzān* is of limited value.

Summary

An explanatory summary of the most important arguments of *Fayṣal* will best prepare the way for the ensuing discussion. For the sake of clarity chapter numbers refer to Jackson's translation, since Dunya's edition has no such numbers and subdivides the text into several opening sections. *Fayṣal* opens by referring to criticisms of al-Ghazālī. Jackson postulates that this refers to remarks by a student, but it could also indicate other critics, such as those discussed by Krawulsky in her introduction to al-Ghazālī's letters (al-Ghazālī 1971b:16). After drawing an implicit parallel between his own hardships and Muhammad's suffering for the truth, al-Ghazālī's second chapter then stresses that true understanding of what constitutes unbelief is only revealed to those with a pure heart. More is said on the possible defensive role of *Fayṣal* later.

The third chapter concerns false definitions of unbelief based on loyalty to particular schools of thought or individuals. Al-Ghazālī is emphatic that opposition to a figure such

as the famous theologian al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) on a particular point should not cause the person to be accused of unbelief *(kufr)*. Chapter four offers al-Ghazālī's own definition of unbelief. 'Unbelief is to deem anything the Prophet brought to be a lie' (al-Ghazālī 1961:134; tr. 92). The principal question underlying the remainder of *Fayṣal* stems from this definition. When does someone employ interpretation in such a way as effectively to deny the truth of a scriptural text and therefore accuse the Prophet of lying?

Chapters five and six outline the heart of al-Ghazālī's scheme for determining whether and how to interpret texts. This scheme is based on a proposed correspondence between levels of existence and types of interpretation linked to them. Chapter five describes five grades of existence (al-Ghazālī 1961:175–8; tr. 93–6).[2] The first is 'ontological existence' *(al-wujūd al-dhātī)* which denotes objective existence independent of human perception. Second, sensory existence *(al-wujūd al-ḥissī)* is some form of vision. Al-Ghazālī's examples of this phenomenon include the appearance of Muhammad in dreams to believers. He comments concerning these appearances:

> None of this implies, however, the transfer of his actual person from his grave in Medina to the location of the sleeping person. Rather, this is simply a matter of his image (being impressed) upon the senses of the sleeping person.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1961:177; tr. 95)

It is worth pausing to note that it is very likely that this statement lies behind an anecdote from the autobiography of the twentieth century Egyptian writer and critic, Taha Hussein (d. 1973), entitled *al-Ayyām (The Days)*. A recollection from his boyhood—in which he refers to himself in the third person as 'the lad'—illustrates how decisions over whether or not to take accounts of religious experiences literally can raise high feelings.

> The lad's father never missed an opportunity of telling the following tale about the sheikh: 'Someone said in his presence that according to Al-Ghazzaly in one of his books, the Prophet could not be seen in a dream'. Then the sheikh was angry and said, 'I thought better of you, O Ghazzaly! I have seen him with my own eye riding his she-mule'. And when that was mentioned on another occasion, he said, 'I thought better of you, O Ghazzaly! I have seen him with my own eyes riding his she-camel'. From this the lad's father concluded that Al-Ghazzaly had made a mistake, and that the generality of mankind were able to see the Prophet in dreams.
>
> (Hussein 1952:95; tr. 57)

The third grade of existence in al-Ghazālī's scheme is imaginative existence *(al-wujūd al-khayālī)* (or 'conceptual' as Jackson, 95, translates). This describes picturing something in the mind's eye when it is not present. The fourth category is intellectual existence *(al-wujūd al-'aqlī),* which Jackson (97) terms 'noetic', whereby reference to an object conveys an abstract concept, for example the hand signifying the power to strike. The fifth grade is 'analogical existence' *(al-wujūd al-shabahī),* explained by al-Ghazālī in chapter six.

The sixth chapter describes the five categories of interpretation which correspond to these grades of existence (al-Ghazālī 1961:179–83: tr. 96–100). The first grade of interpretation is linked to essential existence, and denotes acceptance of the apparent meaning *('alā 'l-ẓāhir)* which should not be interpreted. The second level of interpretation, related to sensory existence, al-Ghazālī illustrates by quoting two hadiths. One is, 'Death will be brought forth on the Day of Judgement in the form of a black and white ram and slaughtered between Paradise and Hell'. (al-Ghazālī 1961:179; tr. 97). The second hadith reads, 'Paradise was presented to me inside this wall' (al-Ghazālī 1961:180; tr. 97).[3] According to al-Ghazālī, the apparent meaning of the second cannot be accepted because of the impossibility of the relative dimensions of paradise and the wall, so we can infer instead that something was shown to Muhammad's perception.

The third category of interpretation is illustrated by the hadith beginning, 'As if I were looking at Yūnus' (al-Ghazālī 1961:180; tr. 98, retaining 'Yūnus' rather than Jackson's 'Jonah'). Al-Ghazālī contends that Muhammad's use of the phrase 'as though I were looking' suggests that, unlike the second category, this hadith refers not to a vision, but to something deliberately brought to mind.

In illustrating the fourth type of interpretation, relating to intellectual existence, al-Ghazālī repeats his previous point that God's 'hand' denotes the power to strike, adding that it could also signify the power to give, bring about or hold back. Al-Ghazālī illustrates the fifth category, relating to analogical existence, by discussing the anger of God. The angry person experiences imperfection and pain, and since these cannot be predicated of God, references to His anger must refer to another divine attribute with equivalent results, such as the will to punish.

Chapter seven states that anyone interpreting texts in line with the principles just described cannot be accused of unbelief. Nor does using *ta'wīl* automatically constitute unbelief since everyone must resort to it occasionally. Al-Ghazālī supports this claim by citing the interpretation of three hadiths by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), whose name, given to the Ḥanbalī school of law, is associated with a more literalist approach than the other three Sunni schools. Al-Ghazālī's point is that even a Ḥanbalī must use *ta'wīl* occasionally.[4]

Al-Ghazālī explains in the eighth chapter the most important principle of interpretation in *Fayṣal.* This is that an interpreter can only move from the first level of interpretation to the second, and so on through the sequence, if he has decisive proof *(burhān)* that the previous type of interpretation is impossible.[5] (Al-Ghazālī makes clear his understanding of decisive proof in chapter eleven, summarised later). No group should consider its adversaries to be unbelievers because of a disagreement over decisive proofs, although it is acceptable to call someone misguided, or an innovator (al-Ghazālī 1961:187; tr. 104). Al-Ghazālī adds that there are two general positions regarding interpretation (al-Ghazālī 1961:188; tr. 105–6). One is for the general populace, who should not depart from apparent meanings, and who should be wary of allowing an interpretation not permitted by the companions of the Prophet. The second is for those accustomed to intellectual enquiry who experience a measure of doubt, and who can proceed with interpretation when they believe that there exists decisive proof that it is needed.

In chapter nine al-Ghazālī states that even resorting to interpretation without adequate proofs should not lead to accusations of unbelief if the issue does not concern

fundamental beliefs. He criticises the philosophers for denying three such beliefs, as previously noted.

Chapter ten continues to stress the importance of distinguishing primary and secondary issues in determining judgments of unbelief. Al-Ghazālī warns against branding as an unbeliever any Muslim who affirms the words of the *shahāda,* or basic creed of Islam,[6] and does not accuse the Prophet of lying. He then adds that core beliefs—in God, the Prophet and the Last Day—must be distinguished from secondary matters, and that no-one should be the subject of accusations of unbelief unless they deny a fundamental idea known to have derived from the Prophet by recurrent transmission *(tawātur).* Al-Ghazālī discusses the conditions required for a text to be considered to be *mutawātir* in the next chapter (1961:199–200; tr. 117–18).[7] To do so would amount to denying the truthfulness of the Prophet, this denial being the critical issue in *Fayṣal.* In turning shortly to explore the issues the text raises, the focus on affirming the veracity of Muhammad's words provides our starting point.

Chapter eleven lists five factors which must be considered before someone is charged with unbelief. The first of these is whether the text is open to interpretation, a matter which can only be determined by those with profound knowledge of the Arabic language in relation to the deployment of metaphors *(isti'ārāt)* in Arabic (al-Ghazālī 1961:199; tr. 116–17).

The second point in considering whether an interpreter should be charged with unbelief is whether the text is *mutawātir,* that is, conveyed by an impeccable chain of transmitters. The third factor is whether an interpreter believed a text to be based on *tawātur* or whether, alternatively, a view based on consensus *(ijmā')* had reached him. If the interpreter does not realise that either *tawātur* or *ijmā'* support the apparent meaning of the text in question, he can only be charged with ignorance or error, not with unbelief. The fourth consideration is whether the interpreter's proof for the need to interpret fulfils the conditions for decisive proof *(burhān).* Al-Ghazālī's references to his earlier works, *Al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm* (al-Ghazālī 1353) and *Miḥaqq al-naẓar* (al-Ghazālī 1966) show that he means syllogistic demonstration here. If the proof is not decisive, it permits only a proximate, rather than remote interpretation, that is, one not far removed from the apparent meaning—here, given al-Ghazālī's scheme, an interpretation which does not lie too far down the scale of levels of interpretation. The implications of this emphasis on syllogistic logic are considered later. The fifth factor determining if an interpreter is guilty of unbelief is whether mentioning an interpretation would bring harm to Islam, or if it is obvious that it is too foolish a suggestion to cause damage.

In chapter twelve al-Ghazālī argues that true faith is not dependent on knowledge of *kalām,* speculative theology, as some *mutakallimūn* claim. Mercy, judgment and punishment form the subject of the thirteenth chapter, while the final two chapters of *Fayṣal* are brief. Chapter fourteen states that charging with unbelief derives from the law, not reason, and was meaningless before the coming of that law.[8] An attempt is also made to establish guidelines for defining unbelief. It is a category which applies to someone who disbelieves not only in God, but also in the Prophet and the Last Day. However, it is not applicable to someone who errs regarding God's attributes. The fifteenth and final chapter cautions once more against hasty accusations of unbelief.

Ta'wīl in *Fayṣal*

The truthfulness of Muhammad's words

The significance of the great emphasis in *Fayṣal* on the truthfulness of Muhammad's words has recently been discussed in detail by Griffel (2000:322; also Griffel 2004). He argues that this emphasis, along with the influence on al-Ghazālī of Ibn Sīnā's theory of prophecy, on which see Chapter 3, is part of al-Ghazālī's attempt to change the object of the believer's trust from God to Muhammad (Griffel 2000:322). This emphasis on Muhammad's words leads to Griffel's conclusion that al-Ghazālī 'treats the text of revelation as if it is authored by a human' (Griffel 2004:140) since the focus is on Muhammad's capacity to represent accurately his mental experiences. Griffel bases this claim on al-Ghazālī's altering the emphasis in thinking about prophecy from the Ash'arite view to that of the philosophers. Whereas the Ash'arites relate prophecy to God's attribute of speech, the Islamic philosophers place more stress on the capacity of an individual prophet to receive revelation. Griffel emphasises the importance of the philosophers' views of the inner senses for al-Ghazālī's formulation of the degrees of existence outlined so far.

Furthermore, Griffel notes (2004:136) that almost all of the first six chapters of *Fayṣal* are based on the thought of Ibn Sīnā. For example, plausible parallels to the division of levels of being can be found in presentations of theories of the inner senses in *Ithbāt,* in *Ishārāt* and in chapter four of the psychological part of *al-Shifā'* (Griffel 2004:131–3). Yet al-Ghazālī is no slavish borrower from Ibn Sīnā, as Griffel acknowledges (2004:137) in noting al-Ghazālī's rejection of both emanationism[9] and the idea that prophets deceive their audience in refashioning their prophetic insights into images comprehensible to the masses, both of which ideas Griffel attributes to Ibn Sīnā. When al-Ghazālī borrows elements of his predecessor's thought he is fully capable of investing them with his own meanings if he so wishes. Hence, it is a further step to say that the presence of elements of schemes of being which are borrowed from Ibn Sīnā indicates a fundamental shift in al-Ghazālī's understanding of prophecy such that he treats the words of the Qur'an as being authored by Muhammad. It should be noted that Griffel's statement leaves open the question of al-Ghazālī's intention, only claiming that in practice he 'treats' the Qur'an as if this were so. Yet there are reasons to conclude that al-Ghazālī did not intend to promote this belief, nor would he have accepted it himself.

One piece of evidence is the quotation given earlier on the Qur'an and the Hadith as forms of *waḥy* or revelation. This statement highlights the revealed nature of the exact wording of the Qur'an as what distinguishes it from the Hadith, where the meaning, but not the exact wording, is understood to be revealed. Second, the emphasis on the veracity of the words of Muhammad is not as new as it might appear. As Waldman notes, among the different verbs used to denote unbelief in the earliest suras of the Qur'an, the root KFR—from which the common term *kufr* ('unbelief') is derived—is only one among many, and is not in fact dominant. Instead the concept of unbelief is linked especially to the verb *kadhdhaba,* 'to deny something'.

> Before KFR itself appears, the usage of *kadhdhaba* is well-established as the major fault of those who oppose Muḥammad—that is, that they give the lie to him as a messenger of God and to his call to a Day of Judgment according to works. In the forty-eight *sūrah*-s of the period, whereas *kadhdhaba* appears in almost all, *kafara* appears in only one quarter of them.
>
> (Waldman 1968:444)

So giving the lie to Muhammad as a messenger of God emerges very early as a basis of unbelief. *Takdhīb,* or charging with lying, is prominent in *Fayṣal,* but whether the emphasis on it can be entirely attributed to the influence of Ibn Sīnā is open to question. As Waldman shows, al-Ghazālī here could equally be reflecting the influence of the Qur'an.

Ta'wīl ***as a defensive device?***

A number of different views have been advanced as to the underlying purpose of *Fayṣal.* There is debate over whether al-Ghazālī in *Fayṣal* is defending himself, the Muslim community or neither. Bello, referring back to *Tahāfut,* describes the purpose of *Fayṣal* as being, 'to expound the legal grounds upon which he has condemned the philosophers to infidelity' (Bello 1989:1). Frank, however, sees *Fayṣal* as an argument for tolerance towards, and a defence of, al-Ghazālī's departures from Ash'arism (Frank 1994:78), an argument to be discussed shortly. Others regard *Fayṣal* as unsuited to acting as a personal apologia for al-Ghazālī. For Griffel this is because *Fayṣal* so strongly reflects the influence of Ibn Sīnā, and is in fact written for a narrow circle of students familiar with his adoption of philosophical concepts (Griffel 2000:309). For Jackson, the work is too brief and general to act as an apologia (Jackson, translator's introduction: 40). Jackson, like Izutsu before him (Izutsu 1965:25), emphasises instead the text's role in saving the community from the harmful effects of unrestrained accusations of infidelity. Jackson terms this its 'ecumenical mission' (Jackson: introduction to his translation, 39), and highlights the Ash'arī theologian 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) as an important promoter of such accusations.

As already noted, al-Ghazālī discusses the need to exercise tolerance over issues of *ta'wīl* as early as *Iqtiṣād.* Hence *Fayṣal* at the very least incorporates a long-held rejection of overly hasty accusations of unbelief, rather than being a purely personal defence prompted primarily by individual criticisms. However, while affirming the view of Jackson, the explanations of Bello and Frank could also contain elements of truth. Without more concrete evidence, it seems unnecessary to pare down the purpose of the text to a single motive.

Al-Ghazālī's defence, whether of the community or of himself, is conducted not primarily by argument over specific interpretations but by setting clear conditions for the decision to resort to *ta'wīl.* A reading of *Fayṣal* shows that al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical

suggestions are not readily applicable in practice. However, stating this is not to doubt the sincerity of the plea for tolerance. For example, in a passage echoing Q2:62, he states,

> On the other hand, those possessed of faith in God and the Last Day, whatever religious community they might belong to, cannot betray this motivation (to investigate the claims of and about Muhammad) after coming into knowledge of these indications that were effected through miraculous means that defied the laws of nature. And should they, in all earnestness, take it upon themselves to investigate (this matter) and seek (the truth thereof) and then be overcome by death before being able to confirm this, they too shall be forgiven, by virtue of His all encompassing mercy.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1961:208; tr. 128)[10]

As previously noted, al-Ghazālī also states that men of insight have had this mercy revealed to them by special causes and revelations.

Al-Ghazālī's understanding of causality has been cited as the motivating issue behind *Fayṣal*. Frank argues that al-Ghazālī implicitly defends a particular *ta'wīl* involving his, 'conception of the operation of the cosmic system in the determinate causation of events, including the voluntary actions of human agents, in the sublunary world' (Frank 1994:78 and also 1997). In short he argues that al-Ghazālī does not consistently uphold the Ash'arī doctrine of habitual causation, according to which events are individually caused by God with no necessary causal link between them. For example, habitual causation holds that when cotton burns in a fire, this is because God causes the cotton to be burned at that instant rather than because fire must inevitably burn cotton (for this example see al-Ghazālī 1997:170–1). Instead, Frank argues, al-Ghazālī accepts a closed, determined system of causality, whereby events unfold inevitably rather than at God's specific command. Frank offers as evidence from *Fayṣal* itself the fact that al-Ghazālī illustrates his fourth, 'intellectual' level of interpretation with reference to intermediary angels (Frank 1994:78, 100). Frank's main evidence, however, is presented in an earlier work (Frank 1992). Here he contends that al-Ghazālī's views on causality and cosmology are in fact strongly influenced by those of Ibn Sīnā.

Al-Ghazālī's ideas on causality have generated much scrutiny, full analysis of which would require a separate discussion.[11] In order to keep *Fayṣal* in focus, the present discussion engages principally with Frank, who explicitly cites al-Ghazālī's need to fend off criticism arising from his views on causality as explaining the defensive note in *Fayṣal* and the call for tolerance over *ta'wīl*. In Frank's favour it is true that *Fayṣal* features several references to deviation from Ash'arism, already noted earlier. The significance of these references should not be overstated, however, and Frank's argument has received several detailed rebuttals (see Dallal 2002; Marmura 2002).

One argument in particular deserves comment here, as it relates directly to issues of interpretation. If al-Ghazālī were to accept determined causality rather than Ash'arī occasionalism this would undermine his own defence of the rational possibility of miracles. Pre-determined events cannot be disrupted, yet it is the rational possibility of miracles which, for al-Ghazālī, allows us to accept the Qur'anic accounts of them

literally, rather than resorting to *ta’wīl*. Miracles are rationally acceptable for al-Ghazālī precisely because of habitual causation, the view that any event can occur by God’s power without necessary connection to any apparent cause, as he discusses in *Tahāfut* (al-Ghazālī 1997:170–81, especially 175–8). It is therefore clear that ‘Al-Ghazālī’s doctrine of the habitual causes…is at the basis of his doctrine of metaphorical interpretation of scriptural language’ (Marmura 1995:91; a similar point is made in Marmura 1989:49). It seems implausible that al-Ghazālī would compose *Fayṣal* so as indirectly to defend a view of causation which undermines his defence in *Tahāfut* of the rational possibility and thus also the literal reality of Qur’anic miracles.

In addition, the full context for al-Ghazālī’s discussions of *kasb,* or acquisition, must be considered (Marmura 1995:94). This is the doctrine that human beings ‘acquire’ acts created by God which they then carry out, a belief designed to safeguard both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Frank sees al-Ghazālī’s references to *kasb* as incorporating genuine causal capacity in the human agent, thus undermining habitual causation. However, Frank makes no mention of the doctrine of the pervasiveness of divine power *(‘umūm al-qudra),* by which everything happens directly by God’s power. This doctrine, expounded in *Iqtiṣād,* underpins *kasb* in al-Ghazālī’s thought (al-Ghazālī 1962:80–99; translated and discussed in Marmura 1994).

Al-Ghazālī’s use of the concept of *ta’wīl* as a boundary marker is evident in his final work, *Iljām al-‘awāmm ‘an ‘ilm al-kalām (The Restraining of the Masses from the Science of Theology)* (al-Ghazālī 1351; on its date see Hourani 1984:302). Frank argues that this work is a continuation of the apologetic concerns which al-Ghazālī expresses in *Fayṣal* (Frank 1994:80–5). In *Iljām* those who cannot understand *ta’wīl,* the masses or *‘awāmm* of the title, are defined in a surprising way. They are, ‘the man of letters, the grammarian, the hadith specialist, the exegete, the jurist and the theologian, indeed every scholar except those who devote themselves to learning to swim in the seas of knowledge *(ma‘rifa)*’ (al-Ghazālī 1351:16). Even setting aside the specifics of Frank’s argument over what al-Ghazālī is defending, the concept of *ta’wīl* is clearly central to al-Ghazālī’s establishing the dividing line between knowledge and ignorance. So, while al-Ghazālī in *Fayṣal* may not be using the concept of *ta’wīl* to mount a purely personal defence, it can justly be said that the concept is central to his defending right belief more generally, of which he would doubtless consider himself a representative.

Ta’wil *and levels of interpretation in* Fayṣal

Are the details of al-Ghazālī’s understanding of *ta’wīl,* involving hierarchical schemes, simply an elaborate ornament to an argument for tolerance, or a sincere statement of al-Ghazālī’s hermeneutical principles? One example of a person who apparently takes them seriously is the philosopher and jurist Ibn Rushd (d. 594/ 1198). He accepts these categories in both *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl* (Ibn Rushd 2001:19) and in *Kitāb al-Kashf ‘an manāhij al-adilla* (Ibn Rushd 1998:206; tr. 130). Note, however, that both these citations of al-Ghazālī serve Ibn Rushd’s own arguments. In the first of these texts Ibn Rushd uses al-Ghazālī’s scheme of classifications to support his argument that revelation consists of both inner meanings, accessed by demonstration, and exoteric images for the less educated to follow. In *Kashf* al-Ghazālī’s scheme is used to support an argument for

presenting information to a person only in accordance with their level of understanding. This differs from al-Ghazālī's use of the scheme as a foundation for his view that decisive proof is needed before moving from one level of interpretation to the next.

The importance of the details in *Fayṣal* is diminished when it is realised that al-Ghazālī presents different schemes for levels of existence in other works. One such scheme can be found in Book XXI of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb,* and another in both *Iljām* and *Mustasfā.* In *'Ajā'ib al-qalb* four levels of existence are described (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:20; tr. 80–1). Existence on the Preserved Tablet *(al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ)* is the archetype of existence in this world. Second there is real *(ḥaqīqī)* existence, independent of human perception, third existence in the imagination *(khayālī)* and fourth existence within the intellect *('aqlī)*. Al-Ghazālī's point here is epistemological. The usual path which knowledge takes is from the Preserved Tablet through the other stages of existence to the heart, or spiritual centre of the individual. Sometimes, however, knowledge can pass directly from stage one to stage four, that is, from the Preserved Tablet to the heart.

In *Iljām* a different scheme occurs. Al-Ghazālī writes as follows: Know that everything has four grades of existence. Existence in the entity itself *(a'yān),* existence in minds *(adhhān),* existence in speech *(lisān)* and existence on the written page (al-Ghazālī 1351:49).

This scheme is introduced to promote a goal which is neither hermeneutical, as in *Fayṣal,* nor epistemological, as in *'Ajā'ib al-qalb*. Instead it provides an ontological basis for the Ash'arī distinction between the recitation *(al-qirā'a)* and what is recited *(al-maqrū'),* that is between the words of the Qur'an reciter and the words of God (Frank 1994:82; on this distinction see al-Ghazālī 1962:126–7; tr. Abu Zayd 1970:60). The same scheme is presented in *Mustasfā* (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:21–2).[12]

While *Iḥyā'* pre-dates *Fayṣal, Mustasfā* and *Iljām* were written after it, so there is no question here of any particular trajectory related to the chronological development of ideas.[13] This strongly suggests that the details of a scheme of levels of existence in a given text by al-Ghazālī are not as important to him as the underlying point he seeks to make, which differs from text to text. This evidence diminishes to some extent at least the importance of the details of al-Ghazālī's scheme in *Fayṣal.* As recently noted (Griffel 2000:333), al-Ghazālī does not mention the scheme in the same form in any of his other works. Yet a core of genuine views is identifiable beneath the apparent ornament. Al-Ghazālī's two main points in *Fayṣal* are that there is a need for tolerance in considering the interpretations of others, and second, that there is a logical basis for determining whether and how to interpret a text. The nature and implications of this logical basis now need to be explored.

Ta'wīl *and syllogistic logic*

Al-Ghazālī in *Fayṣal* makes syllogistic logic the criterion for deciding whether *ta'wīl* can be employed. This type of logic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Here it is sufficient to note that a syllogism consists of two premises and a conclusion, in the form,

for example, of, 'All A is B; and all B is C; therefore all A is C'. Al-Ghazālī prioritises this logic because he argues that it is the only means of determining if a particular level of interpretation is impossible, thereby allowing transition to the next level. This indicates that for al-Ghazālī interpretive choices are not a matter of subjective viewpoint, but can be decided objectively. He stresses the power of the syllogism to uncover the truth, describing it as 'an absolute means to certainty' (al-Ghazālī 1961:188; tr. 106). He does not, however, explain the syllogism in *Fayṣal*, referring his readers instead to other works, primarily *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm*. In keeping with al-Ghazālī's approach in *Fayṣal*, the following discussion will not examine syllogisms in detail. For now the focus remains on the implications of making syllogisms the determinant of whether to resort to *ta'wīl*.

After outlining the different levels of interpretation, al-Ghazālī states that

> Now no-one is permitted to move from one level (of interpretation) to a level beneath it without being compelled by logical proof *(burhān)*. Thus, in reality, the differences among the various parties revert to (differences regarding) logical proofs.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1961:187; tr. 104)

Al-Ghazālī goes on to make clear that he understands *burhān* to derive from syllogistic logic. This stance makes the correct interpretation of scripture dependent on a mastery of syllogistic logic, thereby restricting the number of those who can interpret texts correctly to a small group of scholars. This is a point receiving little attention in recent discussions of *Fayṣal*. Ibn Rushd in *Faṣl* makes more explicit the restrictive effect of making knowledge of syllogisms central to the interpretive enterprise. He indicates that philosophers are best qualified to employ *ta'wīl* because of their knowledge of demonstration, that is, syllogistic logic (Ibn Rushd 2001:25). We can only assume that al-Ghazālī did not aim to restrict the use of *ta'wīl* in the same way, given his efforts, for example in *Qisṭās*, to win broader acceptance of the use of syllogisms.

Making the decision to resort to *ta'wīl* dependent on rational proofs attained by demonstration is an approach also found in *Tahāfut* (al-Ghazālī 1997:212–29). In al-Ghazālī's twentieth and final discussion, which debates the philosophers' denial of bodily resurrection, *ta'wīl* is the underlying issue. The argument is that *ta'wīl* of verses describing the resurrection of bodies is unacceptable because the philosophers have not furnished proof that bodily resurrection is impossible, and something must be proven to be impossible before the apparent meaning is abandoned in favour of an interpretation. By contrast, al-Ghazālī regards as acceptable the *ta'wīl* of anthropomorphic verses precisely because he deems it impossible for God to have, for example, a physical hand or eye. Hence, while the possibility of physical resurrection is the issue in dispute, the question of possibility more generally is important to al-Ghazālī because proof of impossibility of the *ẓāhir* is required before resorting to *ta'wīl*. So *Tahāfut* shows that in this respect *Fayṣal* draws on long-held views, just as *Iqtiṣād* shows that treating *kufr* as a legal question likewise has a long history in al-Ghazālī's thought.

Ta'wīl ***as process or result of interpretation***

In addition to the hermeneutical and theological ideas explored so far in this chapter, a linguistic point arises concerning the usage of the term *ta'wīl*. It is common to understand *ta'wīl* as denoting a process of interpretation (see, for example, Bello (1989:52), and discussion in Chapter 2 of the present work). However, a careful reading of al-Ghazālī's words shows that *ta'wīl* in *Fayṣal* is not always used to denote a process of interpretation, but can also refer to an opinion formed as a result of interpretation.

In a discussion of demonstrable proof, al-Ghazālī writes, 'If it is not definitive, it only permits a proximate interpretation' (al-Ghazālī 1961:201; my translation—cf. tr. 119, which seems to assume a process of interpretation here). Additionally, in a reference to factors affecting the validity of a charge of unbelief, the word *ta'wīl,* having been used once, is implicitly referred to a second time. The first occurrence refers to a process of interpretation, the second, (implicit) reference to a result. If a text permits *ta'wīl,* the next question to ask is whether it permits a proximate or more remote interpretation (al-Ghazālī 1961:199; tr. 116, which again implies that a process is assumed). Third, after discussing the Ash'arīs and the Mu'tazilīs al-Ghazālī states, 'The aim in all of this, however, is not to judge either of these interpretations to be correct' (al-Ghazālī 1961:186; tr. 103). Al-Ghazālī is thus using *ta'wīl* in two different senses in *Fayṣal*—usually as process, and occasionally as result of interpretation. The same phenomenon of *ta'wīl* being used to denote the result of interpretation can also be found in *Mustaṣfā,* as discussed in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

Care is needed before drawing general conclusions regarding al-Ghazālī's views on *ta'wīl* from *Fayṣal.* The question of al-Ghazālī's level of dependence on Ibn Sīnā and its implications is a theme which will recur regularly in the course of this study. Here it was noted that al-Ghazālī's focus on unbelief being defined in terms of denial of the truth of Muhammad's words need not necessarily entail his reformulating his concept of prophecy. This is not to say, however, that Ibn Sīnā exercises no influence on al-Ghazālī in relation to the nature of prophecy, as will become clearer in Chapter 3 in the discussion of *Mishkāt*.

The need for caution is reinforced by the second conclusion, that al-Ghazālī's schemes of existence and interpretation in *Fayṣal* are not the definitive word on his understanding of these matters. This is evident from the fact that different schemes of existence occur in *'Ajā'ib al-Qalb, Mustaṣfā* and *Iljām,* all but the first of these works being composed after *Fayṣal.*

Al-Ghazālī emphasises syllogistic logic as the means for determining whether *ta'wīl* should be employed. This has been shown to be consistent with statements and approaches in *Tahāfut*. However, al-Ghazālī must have realised that applying this process to five different possibilities sets a demanding challenge to the interpreter. As a result *Fayṣal* presents a paradox. It argues for tolerance and liberty in interpretation, albeit

within certain limits. Yet the guideline it presents for regulating *ta'wīl,* namely syllogistic logic, would, if applied in practice, be restrictive since relatively few scholars had mastery of such logic at the time. So al-Ghazālī is in practice arguing for tightly controlled liberty.

This paradox reinforces the view that al-Ghazālī is unlikely to be proposing a practical method of interpretation in *Fayṣal.* An awareness of his different possible agendas is necessary in grasping the significance of his comments on *ta'wīl,* yet, as has been shown, no decisive consensus on these agendas has yet emerged. An awareness of issues of context and their possible role is likewise needed in approaching al-Ghazālī's statements on *ta'wīl* in *Mustaṣfā,* the subject of Chapter 2.

2
'The activities of this world' (II)
Al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl

Introduction

How should a Muslim jurist interpret the sacred texts of Islam? Before determining legal rulings, it was regarded as essential to have absorbed sound principles and methods to use in that task since a legal ruling must be based on responsible treatment of the Qur'an and Hadith. This chapter analyses al-Ghazālī's section on *ta'wīl* in his major work on the principles of jurisprudence, *al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl* or *The Essential Theory of Legal Thought* (al-Ghazālī 1904–1906:I:387–402).[1] The literature of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) is concerned not with determining positive law but with establishing the methods to be used in determining the law Hence two issues, the legitimacy of sources and, second, principles for their correct interpretation, lie at the heart of its concerns. Reflecting this, *Mustaṣfā* is divided into four parts, each termed a *quṭb*. The first discusses *sharī'a* rules, the second the sources of those rules, the third how to derive rules from those sources and the fourth, the requirements for being a *mujtahid* or one who strives to determine the law. Not surprisingly, the passage in focus in the present chapter occurs in the third part, on how to derive rules from sources, since correct interpretation is central to any such endeavour.[2]

Uṣūl al-fiqh is a literary genre characterised by detailed linguistic arguments. This characteristic is reflected in the present chapter, which is at points necessarily technical. The discussion aims to clarify al-Ghazālī's precise understanding of *ta'wīl* in *Mustaṣfā*, and also to examine an important concept linked to it, that of *majāz,* another term difficult to translate precisely, but which relates to some degree to figurative use of language, as discussed in the following pages.

Regarding the interpretation of sources, the literature of *uṣūl al-fiqh* was not the forum for speculative hermeneutical enquiry. On the contrary, it was grounded in preservation, defence and the continuity of a tradition, albeit with some individual variation of opinion. Wael b. Hallaq, who often emphasises the diversity of *uṣūl* literature, notes that *Mustaṣfā* represents for al-Ghazālī, 'a marked retreat to fearsome piety…in which Ghazālī safely stated the "minimum" doctrine without risking what might be taken as daring' (Hallaq 1992:190). To understand why this might be the case directs us not only to the conventions of the genre but also to an exploration of the background to its production. This background consists of al-Ghazālī's efforts both to defend Shāfi'ī hermeneutics against those of the Ḥanafīs, and to produce a manual for students.

Setting

One aim of *Mustasfā* is to refute Ḥanafī views from a Shāfi‘ī viewpoint. Abū Zayd al-Dabbūsī (d. 430/1039) the author of an important work of Ḥanafī *uṣūl al-fiqh, Taqwīm al-Adilla (The Establishment of Indicators)* is mentioned at the outset of *Mustasfā* (see Bedir 2004). In objecting to an approach to *uṣūl* which al-Ghazālī felt was overly concerned with discussion of practical cases of *fiqh* and overly reliant on reason, he writes that ‘the love for *fiqh* has led a group of legists from Transoxania, namely Abū Zayd and his followers, to mix many questions about the details of *fiqh* with its principles’ (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324: I:10; tr. 322). One of the key areas of dispute was the Ḥanafīs’ more positive view of the role of reason relative to the Shāfi‘īs. However, there were sociological, as well as legal and interpretive differences between these two groups.

Mustasfā can be precisely dated, being completed on Muḥarram 6, 503/ 5 August, 1109 (Hourani 1984:301).[3] This places it during al-Ghazālī’s late period at Nishapur (499–503/1106–c. 1109). Tensions in Nishapur society between Ḥanafīs and Shāfi‘īs were a feature of a long period including the time of the composition of *Mustasfā*, troubling the city for two centuries (Bulliet 1972: esp. 28–46). The names ‘Ḥanafī’ and ‘Shāfi‘ī’ denoted not only the titles of two legal schools of thought, but also two patrician political parties whose hostility led at times to rioting. The two groups vied for important political posts, and this divisive situation might help to explain al-Ghazālī’s otherwise puzzling return, in the Shāfi‘ī cause, to *uṣūl al-fiqh*. The social climate in Nishapur during the exact years of al-Ghazālī’s final stay there is not known, but it may help explain why al-Ghazālī returned to a field of scholarship which he had otherwise left behind in order to devote himself to work which was either Sufi-influenced, or else reflected personal concerns. Further evidence can be considered after the introduction of counter-arguments.

The claim that historical context might help to explain the genesis of *Mustasfā* needs testing against statements by al-Ghazālī himself, since he makes positive comments which might indicate a genuine desire to return to legal writing. Having described knowledge which is either purely rational or based on hadiths, al-Ghazālī states,

> Yet the noblest knowledge is where Reason and Tradition are coupled, where rational opinion and the Sharī‘a are in association. The sciences of jurisprudence *(fiqh)* and its principles *(uṣūl)* are of this sort, for they take from the choicest part of the Sharī‘a and Reason… Those who know it enjoy the highest station among the learned, are the greatest in honour, and have the largest following of helpers.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324 I:103; tr. 303–4)

These remarks contrast markedly with the modest status afforded to *fiqh,* obviously closely related to *uṣūl al-fiqh,* in al-Ghazālī’s earlier work, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān,*

discussed in Chapter 3. There he writes concerning *fiqh* that, 'We wasted a good part of our life writing books concerning its disputed problems' (al-Ghazālī 1352:22; tr. 40). It is of course possible that al-Ghazālī had undergone a dramatic change of perspective at some point subsequent to writing these words. Yet his comments in *Mustaṣfā* are only general phrases extolling the nobility of the discipline, rather than revealing any specific personal motivation. Furthermore there is some evidence that al-Ghazālī was less than enthusiastic about the enterprise, and remarks in both *Mustaṣfā* and *Munqidh* indicate that external pressure was brought to bear on al-Ghazālī.

Turning first to the evidence in *Mustaṣfā*, some of al-Ghazālī's introductory comments imply a certain ambivalence about his project. He notes that he had written on the Law and its principles earlier in his career:

> Subsequently, I devoted myself to the knowledge of the path of the Hereafter and the hidden secrets of religion. I wrote extensive books in this field, such as *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn;* concise ones such as *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān;* and [books] of moderate [length] such as *Kimīya al-Sa'āda.* But Allah's determination impelled me to return to teaching and benefiting students, a group of whom, who had acquired the science of *fiqh,* proposed to me that I should write a book on *uṣūl al-fiqh*… So I responded to their request, seeking Allah's help.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324: I:4; tr. 304–5)

The phrase 'Allah's determination', which 'impelled me to return to teaching' glosses over the important details here, but fortunately he offers fuller comment in *Munqidh*. In this work, after describing the poor religious condition of the period as a state of 'tepidity', al-Ghazālī writes concerning the Saljuq Sultan Sanjar (479–552/1086–1157):

> God Most High determined to move the Sultan of the time to act on his own, and not because of any external instigation. He peremptorily ordered me to hasten to Nīshāpūr to face the threat of this tepidity. Indeed, so peremptory was his order that, had I persisted in refusing to comply, it would have ended in my disgrace *(ilā ḥadd al-waḥsha)*.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1959:49; tr. 106)

This statement could of course be al-Ghazālī's attempted justification for his change of heart (Van Ess 1987:61–3), since it involved him in breaking a vow made at the tomb of Abraham never again to be in the employ of a ruler. However, a similar account is given by al-Ghazālī's earliest biographer, al-Fārisī, who writes of Sanjar's vizier, Fakhr al-Mulk:

> He went all out in importuning and suggesting until Al-Ghazālī agreed to go forth. He was transported to Nīsābūr—and the lion was absent from its lair, and the matter was hidden in the veiled and secret decree of God.

> Then Al-Ghazālī was invited to teach in the blessed Niẓāmiyya School… He could not but yield to his master.
>
> (Al-Fārisī 1960:44; tr. xviii)

Whatever al-Ghazālī’s reasons for agreeing to go to Nishapur, it is possible that once there he was caught up in that city’s Ḥanafī-Shāfi‘ī conflicts and either wished to, or was obliged to add the weight of his writing to the Shāfi‘ī cause. So the social situation in Nishapur might shed light on why he produced *Mustaṣfā* at a time when he had otherwise long given up writing works of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. In this context al-Ghazālī’s defence of Shāfi‘ī *ta’wīl* is far from marginal since

> In the final analysis, the defense of the school did not consist in a preoccupation with doctrinal trivia or with the mere collection and rehearsal of opinions. Rather, on a quite substantive level, it was a defense of *methodology and hermeneutics,* for the school itself was essentially founded upon a set of identifiable theoretical and positive principles, which in turn gave rise to an infinite variety of individual legal opinions and cases (emphasis added).
>
> (Hallaq 2001:xi)

If the argument presented here is correct, it helps to explain why in *Mustaṣfā* al-Ghazālī aims to limit the use of *ta’wīl,* whereas in *Fayṣal,* he sought to legitimize it. There are a number of possible factors, relating not only to the difference in genre between the two works, but also to the circumstances specific to the writing of the two texts. While an appeal to circumstances might seem more obvious in relation to the more personal apologia of *Fayṣal,* circumstances could also have generated the occasion for the composition of *Mustaṣfā,* even if not the largely conventional outline of its content.

Al-Ghazālī’s other aim in composing *Mustaṣfā* was to produce a clear manual for students, and this goal influences the length and structure of the text. Al-Ghazālī describes his text as follows:

> So I responded to their [students’] request, seeking Allah’s help, joining herein both organization and precision to facilitate comprehension of its meanings, for one cannot dispense with one without the other. I have composed and brought it to an admirable, delicate organization.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:4; tr. 304–5)

This aim was fulfilled. *Mustaṣfā* is well known for being more clearly organised than previous works of *uṣūl* in order to aid students’ understanding. So both of al-Ghazālī’s aims, to defend his school of thought, and to instruct students, would naturally lead him away from the more personal hermeneutical approach found in *Fayṣal.* In these two

texts we are dealing not with two conflicting personal statements, but a personal statement and a statement of Shāfi'ī party loyalty.

Two features of the present chapter require comment. First, the remarks made in the previous chapter concerning al-Ghazālī's use in *Fayṣal* of texts from both the Qur'an and Hadith in exploring *ta'wīl* apply equally to *Mustaṣfā*. That is, al-Ghazālī in practice treats both sources in the same way, and discussions illustrated by Qur'anic verses and hadiths together can therefore be used to illumine his views on the subject of Qur'an interpretation.

Second, the boundaries of the extract from *Mustaṣfā* selected for discussion require comment. Al-Ghazālī's discussion of *ta'wīl* occurs in a section entitled *al-ẓāhir wa'l-mu'awwal* ('the apparent meaning and the interpreted meaning'). This section covers ten issues *(masā'il),* five of which concern *ta'wīl,* while the other five discuss specification of general statements *(takhṣīṣ al-'umum)*. While the section title might imply that al-Ghazālī regards *takhṣīṣ al-'umūm* as part of *ta'wīl,* he in fact separates them at the end of his discussion of the first five issues, stating that 'These are examples of *ta'wīl*. Now we mention examples of specification *(takhṣīṣ)*' (al-Ghazālī 1904–1906:I:401). For this reason only the first five issues of the section entitled *al-ẓāhir wa'l-mu'awwal,* those dealing with *ta'wīl,* are discussed here.

Summary

Prior to drawing out the most important implications of al-Ghazālī's discussion of *ta'wīl* a summary of that discussion is offered to provide a guide through the detailed discussion which follows. Regarding *ta'wīl* al-Ghazālī includes introductory material and five specific issues. He begins with a discussion of the nature of the *naṣṣ*, or unequivocal meaning, in which he emphasises that, unlike the apparent meaning *(ẓāhir)*, the unequivocal meaning does not permit *ta'wīl* (al-Ghazālī 1904–1906:I:384). After discussing the unequivocal meaning al-Ghazālī turns his full attention to *ta'wīl,* beginning with the important statement that '*ta'wīl* is equivalent to a possible meaning *(iḥtimāl)* supported by an indicator *(dalīl)*'. Al-Ghazālī immediately adds that, 'every *ta'wīl* is a diversion *(ṣarf)* of the expression from the real meaning *(ḥaqīqa)* to the *majāz*' (I:387). The concept of *majāz* is central to a full understanding of *ta'wīl* in *Mustaṣfā*, and will be explored shortly.

Having concluded his introductory discussion of *ta'wīl,* al-Ghazālī turns to the five issues which constitute the remainder of his treatment of the topic. Two of these concern marriage, and three the payment of *zakāt,* or obligatory alms, one of the five pillars of Islam. The interest of these discussions lies not in al-Ghazālī's choice of examples, which are traditional (Weiss 1992:48), but in his treatment of them. The first issue concerns the fact that contextual indicators (*qarīna,* pl. *qarā'in*) combine together to affirm the primacy of the apparent meaning over against a possible alternative interpretation (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I: 389–92).[4] In his discussion al-Ghazālī uses hadiths concerning Ghaylān and Fayrūz al-Daylamī (al-Tirmidhī 1972:II:298–9). Ghaylān had 10 wives,

while Fayrūz was married to 2 sisters. On their conversion to Islam decisions had to be made by both men regarding which wives to retain. In the case of Ghaylān, this was because of the limit of four wives in Islamic law, and in the case of Fayrūz, it was on account of the prohibition of a man being married to two sisters simultaneously. The important question was whether, having accepted Islam, they needed to contract new, Islamic marriages with the wives they chose to retain, or whether, having divorced the wives they chose to renounce, their existing marriages with the others counted as valid. Al-Ghazālī rejects the Ḥanafī view that new marriages needed to be contracted, arguing instead that in the case of the retained wives, their existing marriages could be regarded as valid under Islamic law.

The second issue explores further the issue of the marriages of these new converts. It refutes the Ḥanafī view that the reason their marriages needed new contracts was because the events took place before the restriction on the number of wives allowed had come into force (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:393).

The third issue finds al-Ghazālī refuting the view that 'every *ta'wīl* abolishes the unequivocal meaning or aims to do so' *('kullu ta'wīl yarfa'u al-naṣṣ aw shaya' minhu')* (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:394). The example given concerns *zakāt,* and specifically Abū Ḥanīfa's *ta'wīl* legitimising the substitution of the equivalent value in place of an actual sheep, when offering 1 in every 40 sheep as *zakāt*. Al-Ghazālī argues that the text is unequivocal *(naṣṣ)* and that its meaning cannot therefore be re-interpreted in any way since unequivocal meaning does not admit of interpretation. So a sheep means a sheep, not the equivalent value in another form.

The fourth and fifth issues also concern *zakāt*. The fourth discusses whether *zakāt* can be given to one person given that the reference to giving to *'the poor and needy'* uses two plural nouns in the Arabic (Q9:60). Al-Ghazālī maintains that expenditure on one person is invalid, because the verse is unequivocal regarding giving to several people. In the fifth discussion al-Ghazālī again upholds the status of a Qur'anic verse as an unequivocal text. This time the issue concerns the question of providing food for 'sixty poor persons' (Q58:4). This action is prescribed as an alternative to two months of fasting before returning to a wife who has previously been renounced. Here again al-Ghazālī rules out *ta'wīl* because the verse is unequivocal.

In what follows, after a brief word on reason and revelation two issues arising from al-Ghazālī's discussion will be addressed. The first is the nature and significance of the relationship between *ta'wīl, majāz* and figurative language. The second is the adequacy of defining *ta'wīl* as a process of interpretation.

Ta'wīl in *Mustaṣfā*

Al-Ghazālī's comments concerning the relationship of reason and revelation in this section of *Mustaṣfā* are inline with what he expresses in *Fayṣal*, and which are also expressed in *Iqtiṣād* (al-Ghazālī 1962:212). That is, the rational impossibility of the apparent meaning justifies departure from it. In *Mustaṣfā* al-Ghazālī writes,

'Contradiction of the rational indicator would not be possible in any aspect whatever' *(dalīl al-'aqli lā tumkinu mukhālafatuh, bi-wajhin-mā)* (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:388). The importance of an indicator *(dalīl)* as the only valid justification for such a departure is also stated earlier (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:92).[5]

Ta'wīl *and figurative language*

Ta'wīl in *Mustasfā* involves the diversion of the utterance to the *majāz* mode (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:387), a term commonly understood as referring to figurative expression. But what exactly does *majāz* encompass? There are two difficulties relating to the concept of *majāz,* the first involving identifying what it might entail. The second difficulty is the need to avoid the danger of squeezing understandings of *majāz* into the mould of European language terminology, distorting it in the process. Margaret Larkin, writing about the famous grammarian al-Jurjānī (d. 471 or 474/1078 or 1081), notes concerning 'figurative expression', the most common translation of al-Jurjānī's understanding of *majāz:*

> Though this translation, 'figurative expression' is innocuous enough, it is nonetheless not completely accurate… The categories of what are generally thought of as figurative devices in Western languages—to the extent that there is any agreement about what they are—do not, in fact, correspond to the rhetorical divisions put forth by al-Jurjānī.
>
> (Larkin 1995:72)

Where writers use the adjective 'figurative', it is difficult to know whether they are aware of the less than perfect fit between this term and *majāz* (see for example Ali 1999:88).

Larkin goes on to quote al-Jurjānī's own definition of *majāz:*

> If a word *(lafẓ)* is made to depart from what is required by its original position in the language system, it is described as being *'majāz',* meaning that they extended it beyond its original position, or that it went beyond the place it was originally set down in.
>
> (al-Jurjani 1954:365; tr. Larkin 1995:73–4)

The discussion of *majāz* in *Mustasfā* shows that al-Ghazālī's understanding of the term is indeed broader than the category of figurative language, understood as metaphor and simile, the dominant notions in western language discussion (see al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:341–5). In the course of this discussion he briefly outlines three categories of expressions which he regards as representing *majāz*. Only the first of these refers to figurative language as commonly understood in Western language discussion. In this example he discusses instances of resemblance between, for example, a brave man and a lion. It is legitimate to call such a man 'a lion' because courage is an acknowledged characteristic of this animal (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:341).

The second category of *majāz* refers to pleonasm, or the existence of apparently redundant linguistic elements in a phrase (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:342–3). Al-Ghazālī's

example is the Qur'anic phrase, 'Nothing is like unto Him' *(laysa kamithlihi shay')* (Q42:11) where the letter *kāf* in the expression *kamithlihi* must be regarded as adding nothing to the meaning (Heinrichs 1992:266). If it were to do so, the verse would mean 'Nothing is like the likes of Him'.

The third category of *majāz* mentioned is ellipsis, in which a word is omitted. As in the second category, al-Ghazālī's example is a common one, quoting the verse, 'Ask the town' (Q12:82), which is clearly intended to refer to asking the people of the town. Neither pleonasm nor ellipsis are examples of figurative language, although their occurrence nonetheless requires interpretive choices.[6]

It is worth glancing for a moment at al-Ghazālī's discussion of specification of general statements *(takhṣīṣ al-'umūm)* to put in context the points made so far. Al-Ghazālī defines *takhṣīṣ* as an activity which, 'returns the expression from the *ḥaqīqa* to the *majāz*' (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324:I:387). Al-Ghazālī argues that *takhṣīṣ* always involves regarding the expression subject to specification as a *majāz* expression. (This differs both from those who regard a specified expression as remaining entirely literal, and those who consider that such an expression would sometimes be seen as *majāz* and sometimes as literal; see Weiss 1992:426.) Al-Ghazālī thus regards *ta'wīl* and *takhṣīṣ*, though distinct, as both being employed because an expression is understood to be an instance of *majāz*. So *majāz* encompasses statements which must be understood in a way which departs from the apparent meaning because of factors external to the text, such as the historical or logical considerations warranting *takhṣīṣ*, as well as any supposed figurative language.

To summarise, if al-Ghazālī views *ta'wīl* as involving a diversion of an expression to a *majāz* mode, and if *majāz* does not necessarily involve figurative language, then neither does *ta'wīl* necessarily involve figurative language. This point is borne out by the discussion of issues found in al-Ghazālī's section on *ta'wīl*. As already noted, the first two of these do not deal with figurative language. Hence to describe *ta'wīl* in al-Ghazālī's thought as the interpretation of figurative language would be, in the case of *Mustaṣfā*, an over-simplification.

Ta'wīl ***in Mustaṣfā as process of interpretation or result of interpretation***

Chapter 1 showed that the meaning of *ta'wīl* in *Fayṣal* could be either a process of interpretation, or, occasionally, the result of interpretation. It is sometimes assumed that *ta'wīl* in *Mustaṣfā* refers to a process (Ali 1999:47), but this is not al-Ghazālī's understanding according to his discussion in this text. Weiss (1992:473–4) draws attention to comments on al-Ghazālī's definition of *ta'wīl* by the Shāfi'ī jurist Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233). In his *al-Iḥkām fī-uṣūl al-aḥkām (Perfection Concerning the Principles of Judgments)* al-Āmidī criticises al-Ghazālī for identifying ta'wīl with a possible meaning *(iḥtimāl)*, which an indicator *(dalīl)* shows to be the more probable meaning (al-Āmidi 1984: II:59). This presumably derives from his reading of Al-Ghazālī's remark, '*ta'wīl* is equivalent to a possible meaning supported by an indicator, causing it [the *ta'wīl*] to become the most likely meaning to which the *ẓāhir*

points (al-Ghazālī 1322–1324: I:387).[7] Hence the term *ta'wīl* here denotes a possible meaning arrived at through interpretation, rather than referring to the process of interpretation.

Al-Āmidī prefers to define *ta'wīl* as 'the diversion [*ḥaml*], attested by a [contextual] indicator, of an expression to a meaning that is not its apparent meaning but is nonetheless a possible meaning' (al-Āmidī 1984:II:59; tr. Weiss 1992:474). Weiss concludes from this that al-Āmidī understands *ta'wīl* 'as an intertextual operation, not something the *mujtahid* does but something he discovers' (Weiss 1992:474). In other words, *ta'wīl* is a quality inherent in the text discovered when that text is set alongside contextual indicators. Hence, although their specific understandings differ, for al-Āmidī as for al-Ghazālī in *Mustaṣfā*, *ta'wīl* does not signify a process of interpretation.

Conclusion

Examining al-Ghazālī's writings on *ta'wīl* in *Mustaṣfā* has shown, as in the previous discussion of *Fayṣal*, that caution is needed before making general assumptions concerning his use of the term. First, the term need not imply that the text to which *ta'wīl* is relevant is couched in what is often deemed 'figurative' expression. Second, *ta'wīl* does not refer to a process of interpretation, but can refer to a particular meaning arrived at through interpretation.

Turning from these details to a broader perspective, the aims of al-Ghazālī's discussions of *ta'wīl* in *Mustaṣfā* and *Fayṣal* can be contrasted. While his concern in *Fayṣal* is to argue for tolerance towards *ta'wīl,* in *Mustaṣfā* al-Ghazali seeks to restrict it. Instead he asserts the importance of adherence to examples of explicit texts over against the practice of the Ḥanafī jurists. Where *Fayṣal* is personal, *Mustaṣfā* is an *apologia* for the Shāfi'ī cause. Consequently, the overall argument of the discussion of *ta'wīl* in *Mustaṣfā* moves in a different direction to that of *Fayṣal*, stressing caution rather than tolerance.

While the results of the enquiry in this chapter might seem technical, even narrow, they also, when taken together with *Fayṣal*, illustrate the remarkable breadth of al-Ghazālī's expertise. In *Mustaṣfā* he is seen to be quite at home in the carefully defined traditions of *uṣūl al-fiqh,* whereas his arguments over *ta'wīl* in *Fayṣal* are much more individual. In the next chapter we shall witness al-Ghazālī moving onto different ground again, that is 'the activities of the hereafter'.

3
‘The activities of the hereafter’
Four texts defending Sufi approaches to the Qur’an

Introduction

Having discussed some of the ‘activities of this world’ to which al-Ghazālī refers in the passage quoted in the Introduction to the present work, it is now time to turn to what al-Ghazālī regards as related to the ‘activities of the hereafter’. That is, he is concerned with drawing out meanings from the text which relate to the condition of the heart, or spiritual centre of the individual. How to discern the hidden meanings of the Qur’an is central to his concerns in the texts to be discussed in this chapter. This chapter examines four works which show Sufi influence in their approach to *ta’wīl* of the Qur’an. These are Book VIII of *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn,* entitled *Kitāb Ādāb tilāwat al-Qur’ān,* followed by *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān, Mishkāt al-anwār* and Book II of *Iḥyā’*, entitled *Kitab Qawā‘id al-‘aqā’id*. The first three of these form a sub-group on account of their shared ideas, and will be discussed in chronological order of composition in so far as this can be determined, although the chronology of these texts is not central to the ensuing arguments. Following this, the focus turns to *Qawā’id,* which exhibits both similarities and differences when placed alongside the first three works. One aim of this chapter is to identify the different ways al-Ghazālī defends his belief in hidden or inner meanings in Qur’anic verses.

Discussion of the possible chronological order of these texts is hindered by lack of clear information. In particular, it is difficult to know when individual books of *Iḥyā’* might have been composed in the years following 488/1095, when al-Ghazālī withdrew from teaching in Baghdad. It will be assumed here that the two books of *Iḥyā’* discussed here both predate the other works analysed, in the absence of definitive evidence on the composition of the separate parts of al-Ghazālī’s most important work. Hence it is assumed that *Ādāb tilāwat* pre-dates *Jawāhir,* the text that follows it in our discussion. This work likewise cannot be dated precisely, but *Mustaṣfā* mentions that it was completed before al-Ghazālī’s return to teaching in Nishapur, so before Dhu’l-Qa‘da, 499/July 1106 (al-Ghazālī 1322–4:I:4). It would not come from the very end of this period as it is followed by *Kitab al-Arba‘īn* al-Ghazālī 1344 and *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm,* both of which mention *Jawāhir.*

Mishkāt al-anwār is generally considered to be written late in al-Ghazālī’s life, but no exact year can be ascertained, and this view is sometimes based more on assumption than evidence. Gairdner suggests 500/1106–1107 (Gairdner 1914:133), Bouyges a little earlier on account of the marked dissimilarity of *Mishkāt* to *Mustaṣfā* (Bouyges 1959:65–6). Bouyges’ point is not conclusive, however, given the uncertainty over al-Ghazālī’s real

reasons for writing *Mustasfā,* as discussed in the previous chapter. Hourani contends that Ibn Rushd offers a chronological list of some of al-Ghazālī's works in his *Kitāb al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adilla,* or 'The Exposition of the Methods of Proof' (Ibn Rushd 1998),[1] and therefore concludes that *Mishkāt* must be later than *Jawāhir* (Hourani 1984:299–300). Again, however, there is no conclusive evidence for this. *Mishkāt* appears to be earlier than *Munqidh,* even though it is not mentioned in al-Ghazālī's spiritual autobiography. This can be established on the basis that al-Ghazālī's Persian work *Kīmiyā-yi Sa'adat* quotes from *Mishkāt* (Landolt 1991:24) while *Munqidh* refers to *Kīmiyā,* so at least part of *Mishkāt* must have been written before *Munqidh*.

An attempt will be made in this chapter to gauge the influence of al-Ghazālī's cosmology on his hermeneutical assumptions. Al-Ghazālī's cosmological views are a thread running through a number of his works, including some of those to be discussed here. An outline of these ideas as they bear upon his approach to the Qur'an therefore provides a convenient entry point for our enquiry.

Hermeneutics and cosmology in al-Ghazālī's works

The principal feature of al-Ghazālī's thinking on cosmology which affects his Qur'anic hermeneutics is the distinction between two worlds. These are the visible, physical realm and the invisible, spiritual realm. Al-Ghazālī uses a range of terms for these realms, apparently interchangeably. The visible world is variously termed *'ālam al-mulk* ('the world of power'), *'ālam al-mulk wa'l-shahāda* ('the world of power and witness'), *'ālam al-khalq* ('the world of creation') and *'ālam al-ḥiss wa'l-takhyīl* ('the world of the senses and imagination'). Likewise, the invisible, spiritual realm is termed *'ālam al-malakūt* ('the world of dominion'), *'ālam al-ghayb* ('the world of what is hidden') or *'ālam al-amr* ('the world of command'). These terms for the spiritual realm function as synonyms for each other, as do those for the visible world, and it is the existence of the bi-partite structure itself, rather than its terminology, which is significant, as al-Ghazālī himself stresses in *Mishkāt* (al-Ghazālī 1998:26). There is also a third realm, which al-Ghazālī terms *jabarūt,* and which occupies an intermediate position, but this is less significant to his overall thought (Nakamura 1994:38). When al-Ghazālī discusses cosmology in the context of hermeneutics he presents a bi-partite, rather than tri-partite division.

Al-Ghazālī holds that just as the world around us has a visible, apparent aspect, it also has a spiritual aspect which only those with discernment can detect. The same therefore applies to the Qur'anic text. Al-Ghazālī often argues or assumes that Qur'anic verses possess two levels of meaning, apparent *(ẓāhir)* and inner *(bāṭin)*. These two levels are complementary, not contradictory, a view arising naturally from al-Ghazālī's cosmology. Writing of the physical and spiritual realms he states in *Jawāhir,*

> Everything in the former world is only a form *(mithal)* of something spiritual in the unseen world, as if that thing which is in the world of possession and perception were the same as that which is in the world of the unseen and dominion, in respect to its spirit and meaning though not

> in respect of its shape and form. The physical form from the world of perception is included in the spiritual meaning of that world.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:28; tr. 49)

So the physical form is part of the spiritual world, distinct but not entirely divided from it.

Al-Ghazālī was not the first to relate an epistemological framework to cosmological theories. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī is probably the dominant influence on al-Ghazālī in this regard (Wensinck 1933a:191). Al-Makkī is the first to make a clear distinction between the realm of *mulk,* denoting the visible world, and that of *malakūt,* denoting the invisible. For example, he describes ‘the people of *malakūt*’ as ‘the masters of hearts’, while exoteric knowledge *(‘ilm al-ẓāhir)* is from the realm of *mulk* (al-Makkī 1351:I:200–1).

In turning to al-Ghazālī’s four works discussed in the following sections, the discussion of each text begins by considering its statements on cosmology.

Kitāb Ādāb tilāwat al-Qur’ān

Al-Ghazālī’s purpose in *Iḥyā’* has been summed up in a way which can also be applied to *Ādāb tilāwat.*

> He tried to arouse their interest in hidden truths in a slow and gradual way, by disclosing a little and concealing twice as much… The *Iḥyā’* is, therefore, to be considered Al-Ghazālī’s ‘map’ of gradual education, in which he opens the eyes of worthy readers in many ways.
>
> (Lazarus-Yafeh 1975:373)

This description can aptly be applied to *Ādāb tilāwat,* a work which has received little scholarly attention (exceptions being Heer 1993:235–57 and Quasem 1979:63–86). Al-Ghazālī argues in this text for a Sufi approach to the Qur’an while drawing mainly on non-Sufi assumptions, notably arguments drawing on hadiths and appeal to reason. In this way he aims gradually to instruct people by building his case on foundations which he considered were already shared by his readers. *Ādāb* itself has two concerns. Of its four chapters, three discuss recitation of the Qur’an, and are exhortatory, legal and practical. The fourth chapter, the main focus here, is entitled ‘Understanding the Qur’an, and its Explanation According to Personal Opinion’ (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:290–5; tr. 86–104). This is concerned with the legitimacy of interpretation according to personal opinion *(tafsīr bi’l-ra’y).* Al-Ghazālī presents an extended argument for latitude in interpretation, based on what he considers to be the real meaning of the hadith, ‘The man who explains the Qur’an according to his personal opinion *(bi-ra’yihi)* shall take his place in hell’ (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:290; tr. 86).[2] Al-Ghazālī contends that personal opinion in interpretation is legitimate, despite the apparent condemnation of it in this hadith. At the same time he argues for the presence of hidden meanings in the Qur’an, which require the exercise of *ra’y* to detect. The whole enquiry is set in a Sufi context by references to the opposition between those who are expert in exoteric exegesis *(ẓāhir al-tafsīr)* and Sufis, ‘those exegetes who subscribe to Sufism in the interpretation *(ta’wīl)* of Qur’anic sentences

contrary to the explanations given by Ibn 'Abbas and other exegetes' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:290, my translation).[3] So throughout the fourth chapter of *Ādāb,* in defending *ra'y,* al-Ghazālī also implicitly defends a Sufi approach to the Qur'an.

Hermeneutical theory

Hermeneutics and cosmology

Although al-Ghazālī's discussion of Qur'an interpretation is concentrated in the fourth chapter of *Ādāb,* the most explicit reference to his cosmological assumptions in fact occurs in the third chapter. In outlining the sixth of ten mental tasks for Qur'an recitation al-Ghazālī writes as follows:

> The meanings of the Qur'an are among the sum-total of the invisible world *(al-malakūt)*. Everything which is beyond the senses and which can only be apprehended by the light of spiritual insight belongs to the invisible world.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:285; tr. 69)

He then discusses four veils which hinder understanding of the Qur'an.[4] Further evidence for the influence of al-Ghazālī's bi-partite cosmology on his hermeneutics occurs later in the third chapter. Discussing the tenth mental task relating to recitation, ridding oneself of self-satisfaction concerning one's state of purity and own ability, al-Ghazālī again mentions the invisible world. Whenever someone moves beyond the state of self-satisfaction, and sees in his reading of the Qur'an God alone, then 'the secret of the invisible world is revealed to him directly' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:289; tr. 83). Cosmology, however, while implicitly underlying al-Ghazālī's approach in *Ādāb,* is not his main focus. In fact, the terms *mulk* and *malakūt* do not occur in the fourth chapter, which deals with interpretation.

Although the fourth chapter avoids al-Ghazālī's common cosmological vocabulary, it assumes that all Qur'anic verses have hidden meanings. Al-Ghazālī's most explicit affirmation of this occurs when he discusses the alleged logical impossibility found within two Qur'anic verses. One is 'It was not you who slew them, but Allah' (Q 8:17). The other reads 'Fight them, Allah will punish them at your hands' (Q 9:14) (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:294; tr. 102). Al-Ghazālī argues that the logical problem which he perceives in these verses—how God and human beings can both be regarded as agents of the actions described—points to the fact that only help from 'hidden sciences' *('ulūm al-mukāshafāt)* can solve this puzzle. He remarks that a lifetime might be needed in seeking the unveiling of such a problem, and adds that 'a study of the real meaning of every sentence of the Qur'an needs a duration like this' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:294; tr. 102).

Al-Ghazālī makes no explicit comment here on what value he attributes to apparent meanings, other than to argue that they present logical problems. His concern is rather to emphasise that such problems serve a positive function in pointing to the existence of hidden meanings which add to apparent meanings, rather than replacing them. In fact, al-Ghazālī explicitly denies that the apparent meaning is redundant, stressing in the work's closing lines that inner and outer meanings are complementary (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:295; tr.

104). He states this view in more striking terms a few pages earlier in the passage about understanding the purposes of the Turks quoted at the close of our Introduction.

So, in seeking to persuade those not yet fully committed to a Sufi approach, al-Ghazālī is at pains to emphasise that no-one can dispense with the *ẓāhir*. Furthermore, the same caution is evident in his indicating but not emphasising his views on the invisible realm. Instead he bases most of his arguments on tradition and reason, sources of knowledge already accepted by his readers.

Arguments from tradition and reason used to defend Sufi Qur'an interpretation

Al-Ghazālī begins chapter four of *Ādāb* by quoting the hadith from al-Tirmidhī already mentioned: 'The man who explains the Qur'an according to his personal opinion *(bi-ra'yihi)* shall take his place in hell' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:290; tr. 86).[5] The whole chapter is a sustained argument for a particular understanding of this hadith, an argument designed to find a place for the exercise of personal opinion despite the apparently clear condemnation given in the hadith. Some context is valuable here. In the second century AH there was a division between supporters and opponents of exegesis *(tafsīr)*. However, once it came to be acknowledged that every theological stance relied in some way on *tafsīr,* this old division was replaced by a new one. This was between proponents of *tafsīr bi'l-ra'y* and *tafsīr bi'l-ilm,* or exegesis based on traditional knowledge handed down from earlier authorities (Birkeland 1955:30 and passim). *Ra'y,* in the hadith which al-Ghazālī quotes, would have denoted independent reasoning in general, rather than a specifically Sufi phenomenon. Al-Ghazālī, however, introduces his argument for Sufi approaches to the Qur'an under the cover of the broader argument that *ra'y* is legitimate. In so doing he assumes rather than defends the notion that *ra'y* encompasses Sufi insights. Al-Ghazālī seeks first to demonstrate that, on the basis of both tradition and reason, the hadith cannot be understood to constitute a blanket ban on Sufi exegesis. Second, he explains what he believes the hadith actually means.

Al-Ghazālī begins his rebuttal of the view that the hadith represents a complete prohibition on Sufi interpretations by arguing that statements by Muhammad, his companions and other early believers prove that there is diversity in the meanings of the Qur'an. Al-Ghazālī's basic point is that 'exoteric exegesis which has come down by tradition is not the end of the understanding of the Qur'an' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:291; tr. 90, adapted). This is a conclusion useful to al-Ghazālī in preparing the way for the remainder of his discussion, which relies on evidence drawn from sources other than hadiths.

Al-Ghazālī continues his case for the legitimacy of a Sufi approach to exegesis with four points appealing to logical reasoning. The first three of al-Ghazālī's four arguments are in fact the same point illustrated three times (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:291–2; tr. 90–2). This point is that the requirement that all interpretations should be traceable back to Muhammad is a stipulation frequently ignored in practice. His first illustration of this is that if such a test were applied, then even interpretations by Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn Mas'ūd, another companion of Muhammad regarded as an authority on the Qur'anic text,[6] would be excluded on the grounds that they are explanation by personal opinion. Second, the fact that companions of the Prophet and other exegetes produced conflicting explanations of Qur'anic verses shows that they could not all have received these from Muhammad,

and that personal opinion must have influenced their views. Third, Muhammad prayed that God would teach Ibn ‘Abbas the interpretation *(ta'wīl)* of the Qur'an, yet this would have been a pointless prayer if all interpretation was revealed from God through Muhammad himself.

Al-Ghazālī's fourth point is that God affirms that men of learning can reflect on questions of meaning and reach conclusions as a result of their reflection. He quotes as evidence for this view part of Q4:83, which reads, ‘those of them who investigate it *(yastanbiṭūnahu)* would comprehend it’. The Qur'anic context for this phrase concerns ‘a matter of security or fear’ and the need to consult the Messenger rather than simply broadcast the matter, but al-Ghazālī broadens the application of this passage to support reflection on the Qur'an. In concluding, al-Ghazālī asserts that anyone can interpret the Qur'an in proportion to their understanding *(fahm)* and intelligence *(‘aql)* (al-Ghazālī n.d. I:292; tr. 92).

Following this al-Ghazālī presents his understanding of the real meaning of al-Tirmidhī's hadith. This is that the prohibition of explanation according to personal opinion only applies to two types of interpretation. The first is interpretation influenced by nature *(ṭab‘)* and passion *(hawā)*.[7] The second type is interpretation which disregards exegetical authorities in treating unusual Qur'anic words and phrases *(gharā'ib al-Qur'ān)*. In these cases knowledge of authorities is indeed needed:

> Then transmission [from an authority] and hearing [from him] are necessary for exoteric exegesis first, so that the exegete may, by them, be safe in places where mistakes are likely to be made. After this, understanding will be wide and the discovery *(istinbāṭ)* of hidden meanings will be possible.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:292; tr. 94, adapted)

Note that even here al-Ghazālī sees submission to authorities as a necessary preliminary to accessing hidden meanings. Al-Ghazālī then offers six different types of linguistic phenomena which he believes require the interpreter to possess knowledge of authorities (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:292–4; tr. 94–101).[8]

So, to summarise, *Ādāb* presupposes but does not rely heavily on al-Ghazālī's bi-partite cosmology Instead, in arguing for the legitimacy of Sufi approaches to Qur'anic exegesis al-Ghazālī makes more explicit use of sources which he considers acceptable to his readers, namely appeals to hadiths and reason. As part of this strategy al-Ghazālī introduces his argument for the legitimacy of Sufi approaches under the cover of a wider argument advocating the validity of *tafsīr bi'l-ra'y*. This was a type of exegesis which did not necessarily involve any Sufi influence, but which al-Ghazālī invests with a Sufi understanding useful to his purposes.

Jawāhir al-Qur'ān

In *Jawāhir* al-Ghazālī interprets a number of Qur'anic passages, and also outlines hermeneutical theories. He states that his concern in *Jawāhir* is to reveal the existence of

hidden meanings in the Qur'an, and also offers the most elaborate framework in any of his works for showing the connections between different disciplines of Muslim thought and Qur'an interpretation. This framework and his other theoretical statements on interpretation are analysed in the present chapter. Second, al-Ghazālī offers actual examples of Qur'an interpretation, in order to illustrate the principles he has presented. These Qur'anic interpretations are analysed in Chapter 4.

Jawāhir includes statements making clear al-Ghazālī's reasons for wanting to guide his readers to hidden meanings. His concern is, as often, to strengthen the faith of the believer. He regards *Jawāhir* as important in this since faith is undermined when people perceive there to be problems or contradictions arising from exoteric interpretations of particular passages (al-Ghazālī 1352:36–7; tr. 62–3).

Hermeneutical theory

Hermeneutics and cosmology

In contrast to *Ādāb,* al-Ghazālī in *Jawāhir* explicitly highlights his bi-partite cosmology as the foundation of his justification of esoteric exegesis. As already noted, al-Ghazālī considers the outer world to be part of the invisible world, albeit the lowest part. This is why the physical world forms one of the stages on the path to God, and why exoteric and esoteric interpretations are complementary. However, if the connection between the visible and invisible realms is not understood then exoteric understanding of the Qur'an is obtained without appreciation of the hidden meanings. This leads to scorn for piety:

> Because their intellect was confined to the study of shapes of things and their imaginative forms their consideration was not extended to the spirit and real meanings of things, and they did not understand the parallelism *(muwāzana)* between the visible world and the invisible… Neither did they understand anything from the spiritual world through experience *(dhawq)* such as the understanding of the elite *(khawaṣṣ)*, nor did they believe in the unseen as is the belief of the masses *('awwām)*. Thus their intelligence destroyed them.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:37; tr. 63, adapted)

So a correct grasp of cosmology, or, more specifically, the importance of recognising the existence of the two realms, is necessary for a proper understanding of the Qur'an. This in turn makes a pious life possible.

The classification of religious sciences

Since al-Ghazālī's framework of ideas presented in *Jawāhir* involves an elaborate set of connections between types of Qur'anic verses and intellectual disciplines which arise from them, Table 3.1 summarises his discussion. The types of verse, and of intellectual discipline, which al-Ghazālī considers most important are located at the top of the table, and the others follow in descending order of importance. The verse type in the left

column gives rise to the discipline facing it in the right column. Understanding this scheme is important not only for an appreciation of al-Ghazālī's theoretical constructs. He also uses it as the justification for some of his interpretations of Qur'anic passages discussed in Chapter 4.

Al-Ghazālī first gives an account of his classification of Qur'anic verses (the left column in Table 3.1), and then offers his correlation of these verse types with various sciences, that is, intellectual disciplines (shown in the right column). The same order is retained in the account given here.

Table 3.1 Classification of Qur'anic verses and sciences in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*

Six types of verse			*Ten sciences of the Qur'an*	
			A	*Sciences of the pith*
1	Jewels	Knowledge of God's attributes and works	1	Knowledge of God and the Last Day
2	Pearls	Knowledge of the Straight Path	2	Knowledge of the Straight Path
3		People's condition on meeting God		–
4	=	The affairs of this world	3	*=fiqh*
4	=	Arguments of infidels and refutation	3	*=kalām*
6		Accounts of Qur'anic figures	5	Preaching and story-telling
			B	*Sciences of the shell*
			6	Exoteric exegesis
			7–8	Sciences of language and grammar of the Qur'an
			9–10	Sciences of the readings and pronunciation of letters

The first verse category comprises verses concerning the essence, attributes and works of God, these verses being the 'jewels' of the title. The second category, the 'pearls' of the Qur'an, consists of verses which, al-Ghazālī considers, define the path of advancement towards God. These two lists of verses form the second part of Jawāhir, a long compilation of Qur'anic texts.[9] The third category concerns verses about people's condition on the Day of Judgment when they receive either the reward of Paradise or the punishment of Hell. These three categories are, for al-Ghazālī, the most important, but are complemented by three others with a subordinate role, discussed here in the order in which al-Ghazālī ranks them, rather than the order in which he describes them.

Two of these subordinate categories are given equal status. One comprises verses regulating the affairs of earthly life, including financial and family matters. The importance of these verses derives from this world being one of the stages on the path to God, its affairs therefore demanding attention from the faithful believer. The other

category gathers verses concerning the arguments of unbelievers against Qur'anic truths, together with their refutation. The issues in view here are false descriptions of God, accusations against Muhammad and denial of the resurrection, judgment, Paradise and Hell. The sixth category consists of verses giving accounts of people mentioned in the Qur'an, from Adam onwards, who have followed the path to God, along with parallel accounts of those who denied and disobeyed God. Al-Ghazālī also alludes briefly to the difficulty of classifying verses. When a verse includes more than one of these six types of statement his approach is to classify it according to its most significant elements, so that a verse embodying both jewel and pearl is regarded as a jewel (al-Ghazālī 1352:52; tr. 87).

Having classified Qur'anic verses, al-Ghazālī then presents what he regards as the corresponding Qur'anic sciences. He divides these sciences into those of the shell, and those of the pith, beginning with the sciences of the shell. Whereas in his account of the 6 types of verses he begins with the most important, in setting out the 10 types of science which correspond with these verse types he begins with the least important. For the sake of clarity, in Table 3.1 the most important sciences are listed at the top, so as to make clear their correspondence with the most important types of Qur'anic verse. In what follows, however, the analysis, following the order of al-Ghazālī's account, begins with the least important sciences and concludes with the most important. Hence the discussion here begins at the bottom of the right column and progresses through to the top.

Al-Ghazālī terms the less important sciences the sciences of the shell. 'The shell of the jewels of the Qur'an, its garment, is the Arabic language. From this shell branch off five sciences which are the sciences of the rind, the shell and the garment [of the Qur'an]' (al-Ghazālī 1352:18; tr. 34). The four sciences of the shell numbered 7–10 in Table 3.1 are: the sound, or pronunciation of letters, the science of the language of the Qur'an *('ilm al-lugha),* including the science of the mysterious words of the Qur'an,[10] grammar *('ilm al-naḥw)* and the science of readings *('ilm al-qira'āt)*. Of these, al-Ghazālī regards *'ilm al-naḥw* and *'ilm al-lugha* as the most significant.

Following these, and more significant still, is the fifth and highest science of the shell, exoteric exegesis *(tafsīr al-ẓāhir)*. Al-Ghazālī terms this 'the last grade of the shell of the Qur'an', and contends that its proximity to the pearl explains why some mistake it for the pearl itself (al-Ghazālī 1352:19–20; tr. 36). He offers both criticism and affirmation of those engaged in such exegesis. On the one hand, 'How great are their deception and deprivation, for they have imagined that there is no rank beyond the rank of theirs!' More positively theirs is 'a rank high and noble' compared with those who are only familiar with the previous four sciences (al-Ghazālī 1352:20; tr. 36). So exoteric exegesis is important, but the limitations of that importance must also be recognised.

The five sciences of the shell of the Qur'an are subordinate to the five sciences of the pith (al-Ghazālī 1352:20ff.; tr. 37ff.). These are divided into two categories, just as the six divisions of Qur'anic verses already outlined are also divided into two sections. The lower grade of sciences of the pith comprises three individual sciences. One is knowledge of Qur'anic stories and characters, expressed through preaching and storytelling. This corresponds to the sixth category of verse types. The second lower grade science of the pith is *kalām*. Al-Ghazālī defines this as responding to the group of verses describing unbelievers' arguments. The other lower grade science of the pith is *fiqh,* corresponding to the division of verses dealing with correct regulation of earthly affairs. As in his treatment of the exponents of outer exegesis, al-Ghazālī appears ambivalent in his

attitude towards the jurists and theologians. Positively, he states that both are necessary for the well being of the world. Yet if they practise their chosen occupation while failing to traverse the path to God, 'their rank will be very low' (al-Ghazālī 1352:23; tr. 42). It is interesting to note that al-Ghazālī also writes of *fiqh* shortly before this, 'We wasted a good part of our life writing books on its disputed problems'. A yet more negative view of *fiqh* occurs in al-Ghazālī's analysis of Sura 1 elsewhere in *Jawāhir,* discussed in Chapter 4.

Al-Ghazālī gives no discussion of the category which he describes as 'people's condition on meeting God'. Instead, he moves straight on to the two noblest sciences of the pith, which form the last category. Knowledge of the straight path and how to travel along it is the second most exalted science, and noblest of all is knowledge of God and the Last Day. For the straight path, al-Ghazālī refers his readers to the second half of the *Ihyā'* (al-Ghazālī 1352:24; tr. 42). Al-Ghazālī often distinguishes knowledge in general *('ilm)* and special or inner knowledge *(ma'rifa).*[11] Of the science of the knowledge of God and the Last Day, he writes as follows:

> This knowledge is connected with the science of *ma'rifa* and the real meaning of *ma'rifa* is knowledge of man's relation to God at the time of being drawn near to Him through knowledge or being veiled from Him by ignorance. Some of the principles of these four types of knowledge—i.e. knowledge of divine essence, attributes and works, and knowledge of the future life…we set forth in some of [our] works but did not disclose.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:25; tr. 44, adapted)

Al-Ghazālī's presentation of these ten sciences, five of the shell and five of the pith, exhibits a characteristically high degree of schematisation. It can be assumed that not every correspondence or subdivision is of paramount importance for understanding his thought, given his different classification in *Kitab al-'Ilm* (The Book of Knowledge), the first book of the *Ihyā'*.[12] What is important, however, is to discern how esoteric exegesis fits into the scheme of ten sciences outlined in the previous paragraphs. Although exoteric exegesis ranks sixth out often sciences in importance, al-Ghazālī does not make the place of esoteric exegesis explicit. However, on the basis of al-Ghazālī's scheme it must be presupposed as essential in obtaining the knowledge of God which is the pinnacle of his system as presented in *Jawāhir*.

Two different hierarchies are apparent in al-Ghazālī's approach to the Qur'an in *Jawāhir,* dealing with content and method respectively. The first of these, dealing with the content of verses, privileges texts dealing with the essence, attributes and works of God. The second hierarchy, dealing with interpretive method, privileges an esoteric interpretive approach which detects symbolic meanings within every verse of the Qur'an. The intersection of these two systems would result in the greatest importance being given to esoteric interpretations of verses dealing with the definition of God. Although not stating this directly, al-Ghazālī seems to indicate this in his subsequent discussion of Suras 1, 36 and Q2:255, selected because of their content, but interpreted according to al-Ghazālī's belief in hidden meanings. Al-Ghazālī's interpretations of these Qur'anic passages are dealt with in detail in Chapter 4.

Ta'wīl *and dream interpretation*

Another important aspect of al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical theory in *Jawāhir,* closely linked to his cosmology, is the parallel drawn between *ta'wīl* and dream interpretation. Al-Ghazālī exhorts those who find symbolic interpretation of the Qur'an difficult to accept to consider an example drawn from what commentators write concerning Q13:17. This verse begins, 'He sends water from the sky'. The interpretation which al-Ghazālī presents is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Here it is sufficient to note that al-Ghazālī's interpretation seems to be taken from the *Rasā'il* ('Epistles') of a group known as Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', or Brethren of Purity, a circle of fourth/tenth century Baghdad thinkers.[13] While it is possible that both al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān drew on a common source, it is more plausible that al-Ghazālī drew directly on the *Rasā'il* since he makes clear in *Munqidh* that he knew the work of the Ikhwān. In *Munqidh,* however, he terms the *Rasā'il* 'the refuse of philosophy *(ḥashw al-falsafa)*', (al-Ghazālī 1959:33; tr. 89) this assessment contrasting with his apparent reliance on them at this point in *Jawāhir*.

The importance of al-Ghazālī's interpretation of Q13:17 for the present argument lies in its being an example of the parallel which he sees between textual interpretation and dream interpretation:

> Know that everything which you are likely to understand is presented to you by the Qur'an in such a way that if in sleep you were studying the Preserved Tablet *(al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ)* with your soul, it would be related to you through a suitable symbol which needs interpretation. Know that interpretation of the Qur'an *(ta'wīl)* occupies the place of interpretation of dreams *(ta'bīr)*. This is why we have said that an exegete of the Qur'an *(al-mufassir)* is concerned with its rind.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:31; tr. 52, adapted)

This similarity between textual and dream interpretation occurs because this life is like a state of sleeping, a state brought to an end by awakening when we die (al-Ghazālī 1352:31–2; tr. 53–4). So,

> Before that time it is impossible for you to know the realities except when they are moulded in the form of imaginative symbols *(al-amthāl al-khayāliyya)*. Because of the concentration of your look upon the sensuous, you think that the sensuous has only imaginative meaning, and you become unmindful of its spirit, as you become unmindful of your own spirit and only understand your body.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:32; tr. 54–5)

The references in this passage to the imagination are significant. Both its role in forming symbols which make possible some grasp of truth, and also its limitations, seen in the dismissive 'only imaginative meaning', point to the influence on al-Ghazālī of the Islamic philosophers' theories of prophecy. This approach to revelation regards scriptural texts as being produced when abstract truths are transformed into concrete symbols by

the imagination. These ideas emerge more clearly in *Mishkāt al-anwār,* and so are examined in the next section of this chapter.

In surveying the hermeneutical theories of *Jawāhir* as a whole, it is evident that al-Ghazālī marshals various types of argument in support of seeking the *bāṭin* in the Qur'anic text. He gives considerable time to an elaborate classification of religious sciences, which not only relates to his Qur'anic interpretations examined in Chapter 4, but is also intended to explain the subordinate status given to exoteric approaches to the Qur'an *(tafsīr al-ẓāhir)* assumed throughout *Jawāhir*. Second, bi-partite cosmology is called upon, more explicitly than in *Ādāb tilāwat*. More unexpected are glimpses of the influence of the philosophers' views of prophecy, glimpses which turn into a fuller view in *Mishkāt al-anwār,* to which we now turn.

Mishkāt al-anwār

Al-Ghazālī gives a summary of his aims in writing *Mishkāt*. It is written to explain:

> The mysteries of the divine lights, along with an interpretation *(ta'wīl)* of the apparent meanings *(ẓawāhir)* of those recited verses and narrated reports that allude to the divine lights, like his words, 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth'; and [that I explain] the sense of His comparing this with the niche, the glass, the lamp, the olive, and the tree; and likewise the saying of the Prophet: 'God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were He to lift them, the august glories of His face would burn up everyone whose eyesight perceive Him'.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:1)

Al-Ghazālī's purpose, then, can be summarised as expounding three subjects. The first is the meaning of the Qur'anic phrase, 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth', the opening of the verse commonly termed the Light Verse. The second is an exploration of the various elements mentioned in 24:35, such as the niche, lamp and so on, while the third section concentrates on the hadith about 70,000 veils of light. The Light Verse in full reads as follows:

> Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His Light is like a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, the glass is like a glittering star. It is kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor the West. Its oil would almost shine, even if no fire has touched it. Light upon Light, Allah guides to his Light whomever He pleases and gives the examples to mankind. Allah has knowledge of everything.

The work itself is in three parts, corresponding to the three main topics outlined earlier. The first comprises a wide-ranging exploration of the terms 'God' and 'light'. The second is an exposition of the principles and practice necessary for interpreting the Light Verse, while the third provides a discussion of the hadith concerning the veils of light and

darkness. The second of these three parts is of greatest relevance to the present work, the principles of interpretation being treated in this chapter, and the actual interpretation in Chapter 6.

The authenticity of *Mishkāt* has been questioned, discussion centring on the authorship of the final section, which concerns the hadith stating, 'God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were He to lift them, the august glories of His face would burn up everyone whose eyesight perceived Him' (al-Ghazālī 1998:44–53).[14] While this section is not central to the treatment of *Mishkāt* given here, the issues raised relate to the work as a whole and therefore deserve comment. Of the two detailed studies of the authenticity of the text, the first, by Watt, maintains that the final section is inauthentic, on the grounds that its apparently Neoplatonic ideas conflict with more 'orthodox' views expressed in the earlier parts of the text (Watt 1949:5–22). However, a more recent and thorough study of the issues is offered by Landolt (1991), who argues that Watt is correct in some of his evidence, but wrong in his conclusions. Specifically, Landolt agrees with Watt that the final section of *Mishkāt* reveals Neoplatonic influences, but argues that these influences can also be found throughout the rest of the work. Landolt draws on Wensinck (1941:198), who argues that the first of the three sections of *Mishkāt* is, 'nothing but *a free paraphrase of the fifth book of the fourth Ennead*' (author's italics) by Plotinus (Landolt 1991:28). Landolt also argues for the integrity of *Mishkāt* on the basis that each of its sections reveals the influence of *Risāla 42* from the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā'* (Landolt 1991:29, 31). In addition, Landolt gives reasons for suspecting that two different versions of *Mishkāt* might have circulated from an early date, with material presented in a different order in each. After presenting evidence from discussions by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, he concludes that this issue is yet to be resolved (Landolt 1991:64–72). Following Landolt, the account of *Mishkāt* given here assumes the entire text to be Ghazālian, while the arguments presented in the present chapter and in Chapter 6, below, are not affected by the ordering of the sections within the text.

Hermeneutical theory

Discussion of hermeneutical theory in *Mishkāt* can conveniently be divided into two parts. The first presents the evidence for the cosmological ideas discussed earlier in the present chapter, but which al-Ghazālī emphasises most clearly in *Mishkāt*. The second part of the discussion compares the theory of *ta'wīl* in *Mishkāt* both with philosophical theories of prophecy, and with statements in other works by al-Ghazālī.

Hermeneutics and cosmology

Al-Ghazālī's bi-partite cosmology is frequently in evidence in *Mishkāt*. The vocabulary he employs distinguishes primarily between the realms of *shahada,* or witnessing, denoting this world, and *malakūt* (for example al-Ghazālī 1998:11–14). After a brief introduction, the opening words of the section on interpretive principles are, 'Know that the cosmos is two worlds: spiritual and corporeal *(rūḥānī wa jismānī)* (al-Ghazālī 1998:25). In an important passage, al-Ghazālī states the following:

> The visible world is a ladder to the world of dominion, and traveling on the 'straight path' consists of climbing this ladder… If there were no relationship and connection between the two worlds, climbing from one world to the other would be inconceivable. Hence, the divine mercy made the visible world parallel to the world of dominion; there is nothing in this world that is not a similitude *(mithāl)* of something in the world of dominion.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:27)

So divine mercy is the reason why everything in the visible realm is in fact a symbol of the invisible. Al-Ghazālī presumably therefore sees himself as helping his readers to benefit from this mercy by explaining at least part of that invisible realm. Furthermore, his statement helps to prepare the ground for the idea that the apparent meanings of Qur'anic verses are in fact images of hidden truths.

As in *Ādāb* and *Jawāhir,* al-Ghazālī in *Mishkāt* stresses the complementarity of exoteric and esoteric meanings. 'Those who look only at the outward are literalists, those who look only at the inward are Bāṭinites and those who bring the two together are perfect' (al-Ghazālī 1998:32). A little later, al-Ghazālī writes that 'the perfect one does not allow himself to leave aside a single prescription of the *sharī'a,* even though he has perfect insight' (al-Ghazālī 1998:33). He also introduces another justification for his hermeneutical approach. This comes in the form of a theory of prophecy drawn from the Islamic philosophers, and most notably Ibn Sīnā. While this was briefly indicated in the previous discussion of *Jawāhir,* it becomes more obvious in *Mishkāt.*

Al-Ghazālī's ta'wīl *and theories of imaginative prophecy*

Al-Ghazālī gives clear evidence that his approach to the Qur'an in *Mishkāt* is shaped by theories found in the works of Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī (d. 339/950). In order to demonstrate this, discussions of *ta'wīl* from *Mishkāt* will be presented first, then set in the context of similar statements in the works of the two philosophers, along with an explanation of the phenomenon which they termed imaginative prophecy. Finally, other statements by al-Ghazālī on the same topic will be considered.

Al-Ghazālī quotes the hadith in which Muhammad states, 'I saw 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf entering the Garden crawling' (al-Ghazālī 1998:34).[15] Al-Ghazālī interprets this statement as a reference to 'Abd al-Raḥmān making the journey from the visible to the spiritual realm, but doing so by 'crawling' because the forward momentum he gains from his faith is counteracted by his desire for this world dragging him back. A theoretical basis for this interpretation of the hadith then follows:

> This lets you know how the prophets see forms *(al-ṣuwar)* and how they witness the meanings *(al-ma'ānī)* behind the forms. In most cases, the meaning is prior to the inward witnessing. Then the meaning radiates *(yashruqu)* from the witnessing upon the imaginative spirit *(al-rūḥ*

> *al-khayālī),* whereupon the imagination becomes imprinted with a form that parallels the meaning and resembles it. This type of revelation in wakefulness needs interpretation *(ta'wīl),* just as in dreams it needs dream interpretation.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:35, adapted)

Here we find the same parallel of textual and dream interpretation as found in *Jawāhir*.

Al-Ghazālī justifies not only interpretation of hadiths but also interpretation of the Qur'an by referring to the phenomenon of the imprinting of images on the prophet's imagination. Referring to God's command to Moses, 'Take off your shoes' (Q20:12), or, in Buchman's translation, doff your sandals, he writes as follows:

> The outward doffing of the sandals calls attention to the abandonment of the two engendered worlds. Hence, the similitude in the outward aspect is true, and its giving rise to the inward mystery is a reality. Those who are worthy of having their attention called through this similitude have reached the degree of the 'glass,' in the sense in which the glass will be discussed.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:34)

Al-Ghazālī states later in *Mishkāt* that the glass represents the imaginative spirit *(rūḥ al-khayālī),* the third in a hierarchy of five faculties of the soul discussed in detail in Chapter 6. He continues,

> Imagination, which provides the clay from which the similitude is taken, is solid and dense. It veils the mysteries and comes between you and the lights. But when the imagination is purified so that it becomes like clear glass, then it does not obstruct the lights; rather, it becomes a pointer toward the lights… Know that the low, dense, imaginal world became for the prophets a glass, a niche for lights, a purifier of the mysteries, and a ladder to the highest world. Through this it comes to be known that the outward similitude is true and behind it is a mystery. Deal in the same way with the similitudes of the 'mountain,' the 'fire,' and so on.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:34)

So the imagination is a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms. This is because, as quoted earlier, the imagination is imprinted with forms from the spiritual realm. Al-Ghazālī includes the Qur'anic text as a whole in this, as can be seen by his use of the example of the sandals, to which he adds, 'Deal with the similitudes of the "mountain," the "fire" and so on.'[16] As Davidson notes, such an understanding of the Qur'an is 'tantamount to Avicenna's thesis that imaginative prophecy frames figurative images of the theoretical truths learned through intellectual prophecy' (Davidson 1992:141). But what do the terms 'imaginative prophecy' and 'intellectual prophecy' mean in this context?

Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā's understandings of prophecy are complex, and only a concise explanation is offered here (for useful recent treatment of al-Fārābī see Mahdi 2001:149–

70; and on Ibn Sīnā see Gutas 1988; Hasse 2000:154–65). Both propounded forms of Islamic Neoplatonism, in which a descending series of immaterial intellects emanates from the First Source (God), until the tenth, the Active Intellect *(al-'aql al-fi'āl)* is reached. This Active Intellect is the conduit for prophetic inspiration to human beings, forming, as the lowest in the hierarchy of intellects, the link between the spiritual realm and the physical world.[17]

There were a number of possible antecedents for some of the contours of al-Fārābī's and Ibn Sīnā's views on the human and divine intellects.[18] Al-Fārābī appears original, however, in giving the Active Intellect the position of the tenth and last in the hierarchy of celestial intelligences (Davidson 1992:18, and see 58–62 for an account of al-Fārābī's understanding of the Active Intellect and its role in prophecy). The Active Intellect emanates knowledge without ceasing to the soul of every human being, though only those who are intellectually developed and spiritually aware are able to receive it. Al-Fārābī argues that while the rational faculty of the soul receives abstract knowledge, the imaginative faculty, a lesser faculty, transforms this knowledge into figurative images. This activity of transformation is necessary since only the philosophically gifted few can understand rational knowledge, while the masses can understand and be motivated by the figurative images formed from it.

Only a prophet possesses this double capacity both to receive abstract knowledge and also to convert it into a form which everyone can understand. The text of the Qur'an consists of the figurative images formed by the Prophet's imaginative faculty, and so the Scripture's inner meaning lies not in these images themselves, but in the abstract truths for which they are merely the outer garments. Hence the need for *ta'wīl,* because, for al-Fārābī, religion is the imitation of philosophy (al-Fārābī 1345:41; tr. 45).

Al-Fārābī writes of prophecy as follows:

> It is not impossible, then, that when a man's faculty of representation [the imaginative faculty] reaches its utmost perfection he will receive in his waking life from the Active Intellect present and future particulars of their imitations in the form of sensibles, and receive the imitations of the transcendent intelligibles and the other glorious existents and see them. This man will obtain through the particulars which he receives 'prophecy' *(nubuwwa)* (supernatural awareness) of present and future events, and through the intelligibles which he receives prophecy of things divine. This is the highest rank of perfection which the faculty of representation can reach.
>
> (al-Fārābī 1985:223–5)

Such a theory raises the question of to what extent the images convey the truth of the abstract principles, or intelligibles, which they are said to represent. This question, however, discussed by Galston (1990:43–7), lies outside the scope of the present study.

Ibn Sīnā's account of prophecy draws heavily on the work of al-Fārābī, albeit with some modifications. He too considers texts passed on to humanity through prophetic revelation to be the figurative representation of abstract truths. For those with a particularly strongly developed imaginative faculty, 'frequently an image appears to them… This is the prophecy specific to the imaginative faculty' (Ibn Sīnā 1959:173).[19] It

is also worth quoting the relevant lines from *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt* (The Book of Pointers and Reminders) given its influence on *Mishkāt,* an influence to be discussed in Chapter 6. 'Representations of the invisible world are imprinted in the soul, which then flow to the world of the imagination and are then imprinted in the common sense' (Ibn Sīnā 1958:IV: 136; tr. 100). Having described this as a phenomenon occurring in the state of sleep or disease, Ibn Sīnā adds that the powerful soul experiences this in wakefulness (Ibn Sīnā 1958:IV:138; tr. 100–1).

Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā differ in describing how the prophet receives revelation. While al-Fārābī sees philosophical wisdom and prophetic revelation as two functions of the soul, Ibn Sīnā sets forward two types of prophetic revelation, intellectual prophecy and imaginative prophecy (Marmura 1964:166, 1983:98). Furthermore, while al-Fārābī regards prophecy as being received only after the prophet's intellect is fully developed, that is, reaching the stage of acquired intellect, Ibn Sīnā considers that prophecy can be received suddenly, through intuition (*ḥads*) without the prophet first acquiring philosophical wisdom by the usual intellectual processes. (Ibn Sīnā's understanding of intuition is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.) However, the two philosophers hold the same view that the final revelation, that is the text of the Qur'an, consists of abstract truths expressed in figurative language.

Al-Ghazālī's discussion in *Mishkāt* of the imaginative spirit being imprinted with forms is clearly indebted to the theories of imaginative prophecy described earlier. However, al-Ghazālī gives ideas of imaginative prophecy more negative coverage elsewhere. In *Iqtiṣād*, he writes of the philosophers as follows:

> They claim that if a prophet ranks high in prophecy, the purity of his soul leads to his seeing, in his state of consciousness, marvellous forms (*ṣuwar 'ajība)* and he hears from them harmonious sounds which he learns by heart while those around him hear and see nothing. By [these marvellous forms] they mean the vision of the angels and the hearing of the Qur'an from them. But [a prophet] who does not rank high in prophecy sees [these forms] only in [his] sleep. This is the gist of the doctrine of the misguided *(tafṣīl madhāhib al-ḍalāl).*
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1962:130; tr. 66, adapted)

However, as is evident from our discussion of *Mishkāt,* such a dismissal does not represent the full story of al-Ghazālī's reactions to theories of imaginative prophecy.

Al-Ghazālī is well-known for opposing both the philosophers and the Ismā'īlīs. Ironically, however, in *Mishkāt* he embraces the very theories—concerning what prophecy is and how the text of the Qur'an should therefore be understood—which helped to shape these opponents' approaches to the Qur'an. The philosophers' theories on scriptural interpretation gave 'an intellectual sanction' to the Ismā'īlīs' search for esoteric meanings (Marmura 1964:176). Furthermore, 'It is the theory of metaphorical interpretation that has allowed the philosophers to uphold three doctrines which, for al-Ghazālī, are utterly irreligious' (Marmura 1964:178), these three doctrines being the assertion of the world's pre-eternity, and the denial of both the resurrection of the body and God's knowledge of particulars (see al-Ghazālī 1997:230). In the light of these

considerations it is all the more striking that *Mishkāt* not only affirms metaphorical interpretation, but explicitly draws on the notion of the imprinted imagination which underpins the philosophers' affirmation of such interpretation.

One possible explanation, suggested by Marmura, for al-Ghazālī's apparently ambivalent attitude towards the philosophers' theories of prophecy is provided by the historical context. Doctrinal conflict over the issue of scriptural interpretation was one battleground in the political conflict between Sunnism and Shi'ism (Marmura 1964:175). So perhaps when al-Ghazālī is more positive towards the philosophers' ideas it is not only because of changes in his own views, but also because he is writing more personally in *Mishkāt,* without taking into account the constraints imposed by needing to launch a doctrinal attack for political reasons. However, without more decisive evidence this must remain speculation.

Since al-Ghazālī in *Mishkāt* draws so clearly on the work of Ibn Sīnā in formulating his own hermeneutical theories, it is not surprising that his actual interpretation of the Light Verse is likewise strongly influenced by the same source. This is amply illustrated in the final chapter of the present work.

Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aqā'id

Al-Ghazālī's views on *ta'wīl* found in the second book *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:89–124) are the subject of the final discussion in this chapter.[20] After preliminary discussion of the text, the hermeneutical theory found in the book will be examined, the findings being compared and contrasted with the results of our previous discussions in this chapter. This makes it possible to determine the degree of fit between *Qawā'id* and the other three texts analysed in this chapter.

Al-Ghazālī does not provide a statement of the overall purpose of *Qawā'id,* but it is unified by its concern with matters of belief. Within that unity, the four different sections of the text each have a separate aim. The first is an exposition for young people of the *shahāda,* 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger'. The second section, the focus of the present discussion, examines the different stages of belief, which only need to be mentioned to someone who 'should wish to be one of the travellers along the path of the hereafter', as opposed to the person who aims simply to know the basics of the faith (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:94; tr. 15). At the close of this section al-Ghazālī states, 'Our aim was only to make clear that the hidden and apparent meanings (*bāṭin* and *ẓāhir*) may be in harmony *(muwāfaqa)* with one another and that no disagreement exists between them' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:104; tr. 53, adapted).

Al-Ghazālī also states at the close of the second section that his first section is not only for children. It should also prove sufficient for the common people, but if their simple belief is unsettled by heresies, then the third section of *Qawā'id,* offers, 'a brief and undetailed outline of the obvious proofs' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I: 104; tr. 53). This section was originally a separate work, the *Risālat al-Qudsiyya* or *Jerusalem Epistle* (Tibawi 1965:65–122). This *Risāla* can also help if a heresy becomes common, and there is a danger of children being affected. The fourth section of *Qawā'id* discusses whether *islām* (submission) is identical with *īmān* (belief). Thus the discussion of the *bāṭin* and the

ẓāhir analysed in the present chapter is set in the context of other sections which, while not closely related to it, are all concerned with the general issue of discerning correct belief.

Hermeneutical theory

Hermeneutics and cosmology

In contrast to the texts examined in the previous chapter, al-Ghazālī does not in *Qawā'id* draw on a bi-partite cosmological scheme in support of his hermeneutical theories. The distinction between the visible and spiritual realms occurs once, however, using the vocabulary of *'ālam al-mulk* rather than *'ālam al-malakūt, 'ālam al-shahāda* or *'ālam al-ghayb* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:120; tr. 119). However, rather than using this distinction to justify his hermeneutical approach, al-Ghazālī employs it in discussing the link between good deeds and the spiritual state of the person who performs them. Good works increase the belief of the doer even though the body belongs to the visible world, and the heart, that is, the spiritual centre of the individual, belongs to the invisible world. It is only because of the interdependence of the two worlds that the body can influence the heart or spiritual centre. It is likely that al-Ghazālī does not rely on his cosmological framework in the hermeneutical discussion in *Qawā'id* for the same reasons as in *Ādāb*. That is, al-Ghazālī wishes to take a more gradual approach, in order to lead his reader towards embracing his conclusions without emphasising assumptions which such a reader may not yet accept.

Ta'wīl *in* Qawā'id

Al-Ghazālī's argument for the complementarity of exoteric and esoteric interpretations constitutes approximately half of the second section of *Qawā'id*. In view of the evidence, reviewed in the following paragraphs, that not all of al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical comments reflect his Sufi paradigm outlined earlier, it is worth stressing that such a paradigm is clearly present. One indicator of this is the Sufi overtones of the language of some passages. Early in *Qawā'id* al-Ghazālī writes that if the believer practises self-discipline and self-mortification,

> There would be opened for him avenues of guidance which would reveal to him the realities of this doctrine through a divine light cast into his heart by self-mortification… This is, in truth, the precious pearl which is the ultimate goal of the belief of the saint and the favourites of God.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d. I:94; tr. 15–16)

Later, in introducing his discussion of *ta'wīl,* al-Ghazālī uses similar language:

> As to dispelling doubts, revealing truths, knowing things as they really are, and comprehending the secrets *(asrār)* which the words of this creed signify, there is no way to attain any of them except through self-

> mortification and the subduing of passions, through seeking God wholeheartedly… If you should say that this discourse implies that these sciences have apparent as well as inner meanings *(ẓawāhir wa asrār)*…then you should know that the division of these sciences into hidden and obvious is not denied by anyone of any insight (*baṣīra*).
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:99; tr. 35, adapted)

In addition to al-Ghazālī's language at this point, more Sufi associations are imparted by his provision of a selection of texts from both the Qur'an, and, principally, from the Hadith, in support of his contention that the Law does indeed possess both evident and hidden aspects (al-Ghazālī n.d. I:99). A further feature increasing the Sufi associations of the discussion is al-Ghazālī's inclusion of three sayings on the theme of secret knowledge (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:99). Furthermore, al-Ghazālī twice states that his aim is to make clear that there is no contradiction between exoteric and esoteric interpretations (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:99, 104; tr. 38–9, 53). This is also his stated aim in his discussion in *Ādāb* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:295; tr. 104). All this evidence indicates that al-Ghazālī intends his discussion of interpretation to be understood as in some way associated with Sufism.

Al-Ghazālī introduces discussion of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* through the question of an imagined opponent. This person, concerned that verses and traditions may be subject to several interpretations *(ta'wīlāt),* wants to know how the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* differ. On the one hand, he claims, if they are contradictory, this destroys the law, but, by contrast, if they are not contradictory, then there is no difference between them, and no hidden meaning exists (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:100; tr. 37–8). Al-Ghazālī replies that this is a serious issue which he only addresses to avoid stirring up doubt, and to prevent the spread of the false idea that there is any contradiction between the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, a situation which could undermine the law.

Thus far there is nothing which departs from the framework established in the first three texts discussed in this chapter. Now, however, we enter less familiar ground. Al-Ghazālī introduces his rebuttal of the view that any contradiction exists between the *bāṭin* and the *ẓāhir* with the remark that 'the secrets whose comprehension is peculiar to the favourites of God *(al-muqarrabūn)*' can be divided into five categories (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:100; tr. 39; the five categories and different groups' approach to *ta'wīl* are outlined in al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:100–3; tr. 39–52). Of these five, two do not fit the model of complementarity of exoteric and esoteric. The first category comprises matters which are 'subtle *(daqīq)* and beyond the comprehension of most minds'. The second is formed of those things which are intelligible *(mafhūm),* but whose mention can be harmful to most people. The third category contains matters which are intelligible, and not harmful, but which are usually expressed through metaphor or allegory *(al-isti'āra wa'l-ramz)* in order to make a deeper impression. The fourth consists of things which can be understood in a general way, and yield their particulars after verification and experience *(tahqīq wa'l-dhawq)*. The fifth category comprises designating the language of states by the language of stations, *(yu'abbaru bi-lisān al-maqāl 'an lisān al-ḥāl),* that is the non-literal use of language.[21] As the following discussion will demonstrate, al-Ghazālī's third and fifth categories of the relationship of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* do not conform to the complementarity

model which al-Ghazālī’s introductory remarks lead the reader to expect. Instead these two categories set the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* in opposition to each other, discussing how to determine when the *ẓāhir* must be set aside.

Al-Ghazālī explains the first category of secrets, matters beyond the comprehension of most minds, as wisdom revealed to the elite, that is, to Muhammad and (probably) some saints and learned men. This knowledge, which should not be shared with those unable to understand it, encompasses attributes of God which bear no resemblance to human attributes. This total non-resemblance means that such attributes could not be understood, unlike other attributes such as knowledge and power, which have human analogues enabling some measure of comprehension, albeit indirect and inadequate. It is perhaps not surprising that al-Ghazālī does not mention the Qur’an explicitly in his discussion of the first category, since he is emphasising what in his view can be known only to a few. However, al-Ghazālī also includes in this first category two further examples. The first is the spirit *(al-rūḥ)* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:100; tr. 41), presumably an indirect reference to Q 17:85, ‘The Spirit is of my Lord’s command’, a verse sometimes quoted by al-Ghazālī to illustrate the mystery of the divine. The other example is the hadith concerning seventy veils of light veiling the majesty of God’s face. This hadith, as previously noted, also occurs in *Mishkāt,* where, unlike in references in *Iḥyā’*, al-Ghazālī includes reference to veils of darkness (Ibn Māja 1972:I:71).

As an example of the second category, those things which are intelligible but harmful to most people, al-Ghazālī discusses certain decrees of God. His principal example is knowledge of when the day of resurrection is to occur. This, he says, would cause moral and spiritual laxity if it were far distant, and panic, leading to the breakdown of society, if it were heard to be imminent (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:101; tr. 42). Apart from this example al-Ghazālī offers analogies, such as the harm that would arise from the discussion amongst the majority of people of the fact that unbelief, adultery, sin and evil exist by God’s decree. If we know this to be true, he argues, then we must admit the likelihood of other truths which are harmful to some. As with the first category, al-Ghazālī chooses not to provide Qur’anic examples illustrating this second category of secrets.

These first two categories are unsurprising as examples of what al-Ghazālī might consider to be secret knowledge. However, his third category presents something of an anomaly. It consists of things expressed through metaphor or allegory *(al-isti‘āra wa’-l-ramz)* so as to create a deeper impression (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:101; tr. 43). Al-Ghazālī’s exposition of this category fits less neatly into a discussion of secret knowledge since the material is hardly mystical or secret, as a brief analysis will demonstrate.

Al-Ghazālī’s first example is of a person who argues for the futility of spreading knowledge among listeners incapable of understanding it. Such a person, rather than arguing explicitly, states that he has seen someone place pearls round pigs’ necks. Al-Ghazālī suggests that such a metaphorical statement would have the effect of separating ordinary listeners from those who, realising the literal understanding to be untrue, would perceive the esoteric meaning (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:101; tr. 43). Al-Ghazālī then adds other similar examples, and these are all metaphors which do not require Sufi insights for their interpretation. The opposition, rather than complementarity, of the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* is highlighted by al-Ghazālī’s statement that determining whether there is a secret departing

from the apparent meaning' *(al-sirr 'alā khalāf al-ẓāhir)* depends on rational *('aqlī)* or legal *(sharī'ī)* evidence (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102), as he goes on to explain.

By rational evidence for an inner interpretation al-Ghazālī means evidence that the outer meaning appears to be impossible on rational grounds, and that a different meaning must therefore be intended. Such an approach represents the standard Ash'arī stress on the need for proof before departing from the ẓāhir (al-Ash'arī 1348:14; tr. 57), and forms a central tenet of Fayṣal, discussed in Chapter 1. Al-Ghazālī provides a Qur'anic example for such rational evidence in discussing the verse, 'Indeed, when We want a thing to be, We just say to it: "Be," and it comes to be' (Q16:40):

> The outward meaning of this verse is not possible because if the saying of God 'Be' was addressed to the thing before that thing came into existence, then it would simply be an impossibility since the non-existent does not understand address and therefore cannot obey And if it was addressed to the thing after the thing has come into existence, then it would be superfluous, since the thing is already in existence and does not need to be brought into being. But whereas this metaphor *(kināya)* has been more impressive upon the minds in conveying the idea of the greatest power, recourse has been made to it.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102; tr. 45)

Here al-Ghazālī has laid aside his Sufi concerns for secret knowledge. The same type of reasoning occurs elsewhere in *Qawā'id,* where al-Ghazālī is not discussing his five categories of secrets. For example, in discussing the controversy over whether the reference to seeing God in Paradise should be taken literally (cf. Q75:22–3), al-Ghazālī affirms that it should, on the grounds that this does not lead to anything impossible (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:107; tr. 69). Similarly, in affirming that Paradise and Hell are created, he again argues for a literal interpretation of a verse (Q3:133), since such an interpretation does not lead to an impossibility (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:114; tr. 94). In both these cases he raises the question of whether the literal interpretation of the verse should be jettisoned, but concludes instead that it should be retained. So the rational evidence for al-Ghazālī's third category solves the problem of conflict between the ẓāhir and bāṭin by shedding the ẓāhir altogether. This is an approach rooted in linguistic, contextual and logical considerations, with little connection to Sufi notions of a complementary inner meaning.

Turning from rational to legal evidence, the same detachment from Sufi concerns holds true. Such evidence is relevant in cases when, although the ẓāhir is possible, it is narrated that a meaning different from the ẓāhir *(ghayr al-ẓāhir)* is intended (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102; tr. 45). The verse al-Ghazālī chooses to illustrate this is Q13:17, 'He sends water from the sky making riverbeds flow, each according to its measure. Then the torrent carries along swelling foam'. Al-Ghazālī does not cite any authorities in support of his interpretation of this verse, as might be expected in an argument based on legal evidence. Instead he states the following:

> Here the word water stands for the Qur'an while the torrents represent the hearts. Some of the hearts receive and hold much; others receive much and hold nothing at all. The foam represents unbelief and hypocrisy, which although it rises to and floats upon the surface of the water, does not last; but guidance which benefits men endures.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102; tr. 46, substituting 'while' for Faris' 'which')

As noted earlier in relation to *Jawāhir,* this interpretation is based on that of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. The interpretation of Q13:17 is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, which focusses on actual Qur'anic interpretations, since al-Ghazālī uses the same interpretation, with one minor alteration, in *Jawāhir*. However, one important difference between al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān is that while he interprets the foam as unbelief and hypocrisy, they understand it to represent the outer meaning of the Qur'an. This outer meaning will eventually disappear, leaving the *bāṭin* of the verse as its lasting meaning. It is no surprise that al-Ghazālī refrains from drawing such a conclusion; what is more surprising is that al-Ghazālī borrows ideas from the Ikhwān as his 'legal' evidence at all.

Having sought to demonstrate legal sanction for latitude in interpretation, al-Ghazālī goes on to limit metaphorical interpretation if it involves matters relating to the hereafter. He forbids metaphorical interpretation of the balance and the bridge, stating that 'All this, however, is innovation because it was not handed down by tradition, especially since the apparent meaning is not impossible' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102; tr. 46). The reference to the question of the impossibility of the *ẓāhir* again emphasises that al-Ghazālī has laid aside his Sufi framework at this point.

Al-Ghazālī's fourth category of secrets returns us to the model of the complementarity of the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin.* They are likened to general knowledge of an object and knowledge of its details, where the latter is gained through 'verification and experience' *(tahqīq wa'l-dhawq)* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102, my translation). Generalised knowledge is akin to the husks *(qishr)* while the detail is the pith *(lubab),* terms found frequently in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*. In sum, al-Ghazālī views the esoteric emphatically as the complement *(istikmāl)* to the esoteric (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102; tr. 46–7). He does not provide a Qur'anic example of this category, but it is not difficult to relate his terminology to that of *Ādāb tilāwat* and *Jawāhir*. However, the concept of general and more detailed knowledge being two ways of interpreting a Qur'anic verse raises interesting questions about how al-Ghazālī would apply this category in actual interpretations. We shall see in Chapter 4 how al-Ghazālī provides one set of interpretations based on this distinction of husks and pith.

Al-Ghazālī's discussion of the fifth category resembles his treatment of the third since it describes the opposition rather than complementarity of the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin.* He begins by explaining that this category covers cases where language is used figuratively. He then offers a series of examples which demonstrate the opposition of inner and outer interpretations, despite these examples carrying a veneer of Sufi language, such as the general remark that 'the man who has an insight for realities will comprehend the secret it contains' *(al-baṣīr bi'l-ḥaqā'iq yadruku al-sirr)* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102; tr. 47).

Al-Ghazālī gives two Qur'anic examples of the fifth category, in both cases contrasting the person who interprets the text literally, 'the stupid one' *(al-balīd),* with

the insightful person who realises the need for figurative interpretation (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:103; tr. 48). The first example reads, 'Then he arose to heaven while it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth: "Come over, willingly or unwillingly." They said: "We come willingly"' (Q41:11). The second verse reads, 'There is nothing which does not celebrate His praise' (Q 17:44). Al-Ghazālī rejects literal interpretations of both of these verses, which would predicate of inanimate objects the ability to speak. Instead, for al-Ghazālī, the first verse quoted conveys the fact that Heaven and Earth are subject to the divine will, the second, that created objects praise God by their very existence. Interestingly, al-Ghazālī would have to classify the famous theologian al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) as one of the 'stupid' ones, in relation to the first of these verses, since he takes literally the phrase, 'We come willingly' (Al-Ash'arī 1953:17).

Al-Ghazālī offers one further illustration of his fifth category. This is the expression that a well-made object testifies to its maker's skill. Al-Ghazālī points out that this does not refer to actual speech on the part of the object, and he uses this to illustrate the way in which creation testifies to the power of God. He adds, 'Such a witness is comprehended by those who have insight, not those who stand still and venture not beyond externals. For this reason God said, 'But you do not understand their praise' (Q17:44) (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:103; tr. 49). Yet realising that objects do not literally speak scarcely requires Sufi insight.

In sum, al-Ghazālī's five categories of 'the secrets whose comprehension is peculiar to the favourites of God' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:100; tr. 39) in fact reveal two quite different ways of approaching the relationship of the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. Both complementarity and opposition are evident. Can further light be shed on this by his discussion of the approach which different groups of Muslim thinkers take to *ta'wīl* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:103–4; tr. 49–52)? Al-Ghazālī mentions in turn those who are excessive *(musrif)* in interpreting, second, staunch literalists, such as the Ḥanbalites, third, followers of the middle way—Ash'arites—and also the Mu'tazilites and the philosophers.

Al-Ghazālī terms excessive those who would dispense with the literal meaning of verses and events related to the Last Day. He does not name any particular groups or schools of thought here, but rejects the general approach, quoting verses which in his view should be taken literally (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:103; tr. 50). Regarding punishment, he quotes 'Their hands will speak to Us and their feet will bear witness' (Q36:65) and 'And they will say to their skins: "Why did you bear witness against us?" They will say: "Allah Who gave everything speech gave us speech"' (Q41:21). Likewise al-Ghazālī argues that the existence of Munkār and Nakīr, the angels who carry out the interrogation in the grave, and references to the balance, the bridge and the Day of Judgment itself should all be accepted literally.[22]

Second, in contrast to those who turn into allegory or metaphor the events of judgment, al-Ghazālī discusses the famous jurist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and his followers, those most critical of *ta'wīl*. He comments that Ibn Ḥanbal's prohibition was for the common good: 'Whenever it *[ta'wīl]* is allowed matters become worse and go out of control, overstepping the limits of moderation. Things which go beyond the limits of moderation are beyond control' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:103; tr. 51). Al-Ghazālī does not attempt to integrate this statement into his wider discussion of *ta'wīl,* and it has been argued that al-Ghazālī here endorses in principle Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's stance (Makdisi

1987a:250, 1987b:49). However, three statements from *Qawā'id* suggest that al-Ghazālī approves of this prohibition of *ta'wīl* on pragmatic grounds, as a check on false belief spreading among the masses, rather than because he agrees entirely with Ibn Ḥanbal.

The first statement is al-Ghazālī's reference to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's forbidding *ta'wīl* of all but three hadiths (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:103; tr. 50).[23] This is significant because the same point, with the same hadiths quoted, is made in *Fayṣal* (al-Ghazālī 1961:184; tr. 101). In that work, however, Ghazālī's point is that even the Ḥanbalite position requires use of *ta'wīl* in the case of these hadiths, implying that the Ḥanbalite opposition to *ta'wīl* in principle has to yield to unavoidable evidence in practice. The second statement reads, 'The true middle-road between the complete allegorism and the rigidity *(jumūd)* of the Ḥanbalites is subtle and obscure (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:104; tr. 52). The third relevant remark is, 'But he who bases his knowledge of these things on mere hearsay will thereby fail to secure a firm foothold or gain a well-defined position therein. Such a man who confines himself to mere hearsay would do better to follow the position of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:104; tr. 52, adapted). It thus seems clear that the one position which al-Ghazālī does not endorse in his discussion is Ḥanbalite rigidity.

Following his discussion of the Ḥanbalite position, al-Ghazālī turns to his third group, the Ash'arites. He describes them as occupiers of a middle position *(iqtiṣād)*, allowing *ta'wil* concerning divine attributes but not in relation to the Last Day. Although al-Ghazālī uses the same term, *iqtiṣād*, to describe this middle position and his own statement about the true way which is 'subtle and difficult', quoted earlier, it is difficult to know whether he equates his own statement concerning the light of certainty with the Ash'arite position. Both the Ash'arite position and al-Ghazālī's summary of the position of the insightful ('whatever agrees with what they see with the light of certainty they affirm, and whatever disagrees with it they interpret'), involve departing from the *ẓāhir* where this seems essential. However, the phrase 'light of certainty' would not seem to describe the rational search for *burhān* or demonstrative proof which is needed according to al-Ash'arī before a departure from the *ẓāhir* is regarded as legitimate. Yet caution is needed in interpreting al-Ghazālī's phraseology, since he sometimes uses language implying Sufi associations in the context of his non-Sufi writing. Once again the path of wisdom is to admit that al-Ghazālī does not reveal enough to resolve the issue.

After the Ash'arites, al-Ghazālī mentions the Mu'tazilites and the philosophers. The Mu'tazilites, who emphasised the role of reason, interpret figuratively elements of the Last Day and other aspects of belief but retain literal understanding of the resurrection of the body, the pleasures of Paradise and the torments of Hell. The philosophers, however, go furthest in denying the *ẓāhir*, rejecting the literal understanding of both bodily resurrection and the experiences of Paradise and Hell. Al-Ghazālī therefore labels the philosophers extremists.[24]

Al-Ghazālī's account of some of the most important groups in Islamic thought and their positions on *ta'wīl* makes reference, albeit extremely briefly, to some of the great theological debates of the preceding centuries of Islam regarding the experiences of death and judgement, and the interpretation of the anthropomorphic language of the Qur'an.

These debates did not occur entirely within the context of Sufism, whereas his own argument for the complementarity of exoteric and esoteric interpretations is set in a framework with definite Sufi associations. In short, while his five categories ostensibly relate to Sufism, his discussion of other groups does not necessarily relate to it, with the possible exception of the enigmatic statement of his own view. Again, as in *Ādāb tilāwat,* al-Ghazālī weaves together Sufi and non-Sufi material to create a complex pattern.

Qawāʿid moves between two models of *ta'wīl*. In one, the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* are complementary, a model which legitimises a form of Sufism which seeks to broaden the understanding of a text without undermining the validity of the *ẓāhir*. The second model presents a different debate concerning the legitimacy of non-apparent meanings displacing rather than complementing apparent meanings. Despite Sufi terminology and reference to the Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī in *Qawāʿid,* al-Ghazālī only sometimes presents *ta'wīl* as involving Sufi perception of hidden meanings. At other times the term denotes the non-mystical process of determining whether and how a given verse employs non-literal language.

Why does al-Ghazālī appear to understand the term *ta'wīl* in two apparently conflicting ways? It is likely that his frequent shifts between the two senses of *ta'wīl* in *Qawāʿid* in fact serve a tactical purpose. The aim is to persuade the reader who is undecided as to the legitimacy of Sufism that Sufi thinking operates in a way compatible with other types of theological reflection and analysis, although al-Ghazālī leaves the nature of this compatibility deliberately undefined. This analysis would fit with the description of *Iḥyā'* as his 'map of gradual education' quoted earlier (Lazarus-Yafeh 1975:373, and see earlier), and also with al-Ghazālī's clear awareness of two different ways to depart from the apparent meaning of a text, ways which form the organising principle for Part 1 of the present study (see Introduction). This cautious approach recalls that of *Ādāb tilāwat,* which appeals to hadiths and reason, rather than specifically Sufi sources of knowledge. However, whereas these two books of *Iḥyā'* share a certain commonality of approach, the understanding of *ta'wīl* in *Jawāhir* and *Mishkāt* is presented in more overtly Sufi terms.

Conclusion

The first three of the four texts discussed in this chapter, while sharing a common basic framework, possess certain distinctives in their theories of Qur'an interpretation. *Ādāb tilāwat* presents an argument for the legitimacy of Sufi exegesis based on hadiths and reason rather than on Sufi assumptions. *Jawāhir* sets out a detailed scheme for locating exoteric exegesis in the broader scheme of Qur'anic sciences. Al-Ghazālī's well-known love of classifications should, however, caution us against seeking to apply this framework to others of his works, although its general outlines, and particularly the relatively low status granted to exoteric exegesis, are important. *Mishkāt al-anwar,* meanwhile, draws on al-Fārābī's and Ibn Sīnā's theory of imaginative prophecy, and also provides the fullest discussion of the cosmological basis for al-Ghazālī's Sufi approach to the text.

However, despite these distinctives in emphasis and presentation, all three texts affirm that both exoteric and esoteric interpretations are necessary and that esoteric interpretations supplement and build on exoteric exegesis, rather than replacing it. The central hermeneutical message of these texts is that every verse has both an exoteric and an esoteric interpretation. To neglect the latter, according to *Ādāb Tilāwat,* constitutes, as noted earlier, the fourth veil in hindering proper understanding of the Qur'an. By contrast, *Qawā'id* mingles this approach with an understanding of *ta'wīl* reminiscent of the approaches found in the first two chapters of the present work, according to which the apparent meaning must be laid aside whenever reason demonstrates it to be impossible.

Returning to the questions raised at the outset of the chapter, al-Ghazālī uses, as Lazarus-Yafeh suggests, bi-partite cosmology to justify his approach to the Qur'an. The prominence of this cosmological framework varies across the texts discussed, but is present in all four. Examining the term 'Sufi influence' used in relation to al-Ghazālī's theories of Qur'an interpretation also shows that these theories illustrate the highly intellectual character of such influence. This is evident in the elaborate arrangement of sciences in *Jawāhir,* and in the influence of the philosophers' theories in *Mishkāt*.

Having examined at length al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical theories it is now time to turn to his actual practice. To what extent does this reflect the ideas discussed so far, and what degree of coherence exists between theory and practice? *Jawāhir* provides the first subject for this comparison.

Part II
Al-Ghazālī’s hermeneutical practice

4
Sailing to the midst of the fathomless ocean
Jawāhir al-Qur'ān

Introduction

In the opening lines of *Jawāhir* al-Ghazālī asks of those who recite the Qur'an and learn its apparent meanings, 'Was it not your duty to sail to the midst of the fathomless ocean of these meanings?' Referring to those who have indeed done this and dived to the depths in search of jewels, he adds that in his book, 'I now wish to guide you to the manner of the journey of these people, of their diving and their swimming' (*Jawāhir* 8; tr. 19–20). Chapter 3 outlined the theory of interpretation and the classification of Qur'anic verses which al-Ghazālī presents in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*. The present chapter extends the discussion of *Jawāhir* to explore the examples of Qur'anic interpretation which al-Ghazālī provides, and so to discover what kind of guide al-Ghazālī provides to those who wish to dive for jewels.

Al-Ghazālī quotes a large number of Qur'anic verses in the second half of *Jawāhir,* terming them the jewels and pearls of the Qur'an. However, he does not interpret the verses he chooses, presenting only a very lengthy list of quotations.[1] While any act of selection is also implicitly one of interpretation, his listing of verses will not be examined here. Instead, attention is given in this chapter to the principles of selection he employs, as set out in Part One of *Jawāhir*. Al-Ghazālī's text takes its place in the ongoing debate over whether certain Qur'anic passages were more important than others. For example, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the renowned Ḥanbalī writer, cites *Jawāhir* in discussing this issue (Ibn Taymiyya 1962:XVII:49–50).

The Qur'anic interpretations in *Jawāhir* are presented in two different settings. Al-Ghazālī discusses some verses in the process of presenting an argument of his own. In what follows, such treatments of verses are termed isolated interpretations. At other times al-Ghazālī takes the discussion of a particular passage from the Qur'an as the organising principle of a chapter.

The isolated interpretations fall into two categories. One is interpretations which reflect al-Ghazālī's views on *ta'wīl* discussed in Chapter 3. This approach presupposes that Qur'anic revelation comprises two levels of discourse. One is the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*), which is a depiction of abstract spiritual truths in a readily understandable, concrete form, necessary so that the common people can understand and obey the commandments of Islam. However, there is also a second, inner meaning (*bāṭin*) which special insight can reveal, and which is the most profound and important meaning of the text. The second category of isolated interpretations is al-Ghazālī's treatment of the issue of scientific knowledge in relation to the Qur'an. This discussion encapsulates views which deserve attention not least for their subsequent fame in succeeding centuries.

In the chapters of *Jawāhir* where more detailed comment is given on a particular verse or passage al-Ghazālī turns his attention to *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, the opening sura of the Qur'an, to the Throne Verse (Q2:255), and to *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q112), three very famous passages of the Qur'an.[2] Chapter Seventeen affirms that readers who take note of this type of treatment of Qur'anic verses will find that their knowledge becomes abundant and their mind opened, so that they may enjoy the Paradise of those who know *('ārifūn)* (al-Ghazālī 1352:49; tr. 83).[3]

Isolated interpretations

Ta'wīl

Al-Ghazālī advances a number of isolated interpretations which rely on his understanding of *ta'wīl*. That is, discerning the verses' true significance depends on accepting that a spiritual meaning lies behind the apparent meaning of the words. Al-Ghazālī does not always make this assumption explicit, but it is evident from the nature of his discussions. The interpretations can be divided into four groups, analysed in the order in which they occur in *Jawāhir*.

(1) The first such interpretation is of Q96:4–5, which refers to God, 'Who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know'. Al-Ghazālī states that this refers to:

> Anything in existence by means of which the forms of knowledge are engraved on the plates of human souls… This pen is spiritual, since the spirit of pen and its reality are found in it… A pen being made of wood or reed does not belong to the reality of pen.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:30; tr. 51)[4]

He terms this an example of *ishārāt,* pointers, saying that 'It is not improbable that pointers of this kind are present in the Qur'an' (al-Ghazālī 1352:30; tr. 51). In support of this type of interpretation, al-Ghazālī calls attention to what he terms the *tafsīr,* or exegesis, of Q13:17 (al-Ghazālī 1352:30; tr. 52). This *'tafsīr'* is in fact an interpretation found in the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', as noted in the previous chapter. Al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān take a very similar approach to this verse, (Goldziher 1920:199, cf. 195–6), albeit with differences in matters of detail, as a brief comparison will demonstrate.[5]

Al-Ghazālī concentrates on the first part of the verse, which reads, 'He sends water from the sky making riverbeds flow, each according to its measure. Then the torrent carries along swelling foam'. Al-Ghazālī writes, 'Observe how God has likened knowledge *('ilm)* with water, hearts *(qulūb)* with riverbeds and springs, and error *(ḍalāl)* with foam' (al-Ghazālī 1352:30; tr. 51, adapted).

The Ikhwān interpret the same verse as follows:

> 'He sends water from the sky' means the Qur'an. 'Making riverbeds flow each according to their measure' means the receptivity of hearts, according to their measure, either small or great. 'Then the torrent carries

> along swelling foam' means what its expressions and apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) convey as obscure meanings received by the hearts of hypocrites.
> (Ikhwān 1957:IV:77)

While the details are in some cases different from those offered by al-Ghazālī, the overall impression is very similar. The Ikhwān, like al-Ghazālī, see the riverbeds as representing hearts, specifying that here there is a reference to memorising the Qur'an according to one's capacity. This image of hearts as riverbeds corresponds exactly with al-Ghazālī's account, providing a common background within which differences of detail occur. For the Ikhwān, water symbolises the Qur'an, rather than knowledge. The foam, error (*ḍalāl*) for al-Ghazālī, represents for the Ikhwān obscurities *(mutashābihāt)* in the meanings of Qur'anic verses, memorised by hypocrites. Whereas al-Ghazālī introduces the verse as evidence for his belief in hidden meanings, the Ikhwān draw on it to describe the establishment of God's law on earth. However, while the details of al-Ghazālī's adherence to and departure from the interpretation of the Ikhwān are of interest, the significance of the comparison for the present study lies in al-Ghazālī's borrowing his basic approach to this verse from the *Rasā'il*.[6]

Al-Ghazālī's reliance on the Ikhwān is found in two of his other works. As noted in Chapter 3, in his interpretation of Q13:17 in Book II of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id,* al-Ghazālī interprets the water not as *'ilm,* as in *Jawāhir,* but as representing the Qur'an, the same interpretation as occurs in the *Rasā'il* (al-Ghazālī, n.d.: I:102; tr. 46).[7] In *Mishkāt* al-Ghazālī, again writing on Q13:17, covers both options in stating that 'the Qur'anic commentaries say that water is knowledge and the Qur'an, while the riverbeds are hearts' (al-Ghazālī 1998:32). This dependence on the Ikhwān in *Jawāhir, Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* and *Mishkāt* is noteworthy in the context of al-Ghazālī's harsh criticism of them in *Munqidh,* as 'the refuse of philosophy', noted in Chapter 3.

(2) The second category of verses interpreted via reliance on *ta'wīl* concerns the general issue of discerning the secrets of the invisible world. Al-Ghazālī writes as follows:

> How will you be able to understand these when you do not understand the language of states *(lisān al-aḥwāl)*? On the contrary, you suppose that in the universe there is only that of statement *(maqāl)*. This is why you did not understand the meaning of the words of God (may He be exalted!) 'there is nothing which does not celebrate His praise' (Q17:44). Nor do you understand the meaning of the words of God, 'We come willingly' (Q41:11).
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:33; tr. 57, adapted)

On a similar theme al-Ghazālī quotes the verse, 'Whatever mercy Allah accords to mankind, none will be able to withhold; and whatever He withholds, none will be able to release thereafter' (Q35:2). He relates this reference to mercy to the knowledge granted to the *'ārif* who discerns the secrets of the invisible world (al-Ghazālī 1352:37; tr. 63). Al-Ghazālī uses these verses to emphasise his belief that *ta'wīl* is needed in order to penetrate the true meaning of the verses in question.

(3) The third category of discussion relying on *ta'wīl* occurs when al-Ghazālī gathers verses in support of his contention that the Paradise which the *'ārifūn* enjoy is different from that experienced by the majority of believers (al-Ghazālī 1352:50; tr. 85). He weaves Qur'anic phrases into his account to strengthen his argument that the defining experience of this Paradise is beholding God's glory *(al-naẓar ilā jalāl Allāh)*. This Paradisal experience is contrasted with the Paradise which satisfies 'sensuous desires' *(al-shahawāt al-maḥsūsa)*. Al-Ghazālī describes the experience of the *'ārifūn* as 'a Paradise as wide as the heavens and the earth' (Q3:133), and where 'clusters [of fruits] are close at hand' (Q69:23). For al-Ghazālī these fruits are the attributes *(ṣifāt)* of the *'ārifūn,* and are 'neither withheld nor forbidden' (Q56:33). *Jawāhir* emphasises the contrast between this experience and the merely physical pleasures of Paradise more strongly than is found, for example, in *Iḥyā'* Book XL, *Kitāb Dhikr al-mawt*. In this work al-Ghazālī only goes so far as to refer to, 'the vision of the Divine Countenance, which is the greatest of all delights, and which shall cause one to be quite oblivious *(yansī)* of the pleasures of the people of Heaven' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:528; tr. 251).

Al-Ghazālī states in *Tahāfut* that the denial of corporeal pleasures in Paradise contradicts Islamic teaching.[8] He regards the purely allegorical interpretation of such verses as unacceptable, but immediately continues as follows:

> What, then, is there to stand in the way of realizing the combination of both [kinds] of happiness, the spiritual and bodily?… Rather, combining the two represents what is more perfect, [rendering] the thing promised the most perfect of things. Moreover, this is possible; hence belief in it (in accordance with religious law) is obligatory.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1997:218)

In *Jawāhir,* this combination of spiritual and physical pleasure is presented with much greater emphasis on the superiority of the spiritual pleasures than is found in *Tahāfut,* yet the seeds of such a view can be seen in the earlier work.

(4) The fourth example of implicit reliance on *ta'wīl* occurs in the same chapter of *Jawāhir* in which the Paradise of the *'ārifūn* is discussed. Al-Ghazālī draws a parallel between the mockery such *'ārifūn* suffer and the scorn directed at Noah (al-Ghazālī 1352:51; tr. 85). 'Those who know' are made to quote Noah's words, 'If you mock us, we will mock you, as you are mocking. You shall surely learn who will be afflicted by a degrading punishment' (Q 11:38–9). For al-Ghazālī, linking the fate of the *'ārifūn* to that of Noah is apposite because, 'The *'ārifūn* are pre-occupied with the preparation of the ship of salvation *(safīnat al-najāt)* for others and themselves'. There is a faint echo of Q29:15 here, which states of Noah, 'we saved him and the companions of the ark' *(safīna)*. However, the *Ikhwān* refer to their own teachings as *safīnat al-najāt* (Ikhwān 1957:IV:18), and it is plausible, in view of the influence of the *Rasā'il* demonstrated above, that al-Ghazālī found this image appealing and adopted it for his own use. Whether borrowing from the Ikhwān or not, according to both al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān the initiated are brought on board the ship because of their special knowledge.

To sum up, these four discussions presuppose the need for *ta'wīl,* while two of them indicate instances of influence derived from the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. We turn now to

another topic addressed by al-Ghazālī in the course of his Qur'anic exegesis is the possible presence in the Qur'an of the roots or principles of all intellectual disciplines.

Qur'anic interpretation and intellectual disciplines

Al-Ghazālī's categorisation of the religious sciences which derive from the Qur'an, found in Chapter Four of *Jawāhir,* was discussed in Chapter 3. After presenting this categorisation, al-Ghazālī argues that it is not only religious sciences that can be found in the Qur'an. The principles of all other disciplines are 'not outside the Qur'an *(laysat awā'il khārija 'an al-Qur'ān)*' (al-Ghazālī 1352:26; tr. 46). This includes disciplines which have fallen out of use, those which are yet to be discovered and those encompassed by present knowledge—in short, disciplines of the past, present and future. All of these disciplines are aspects of God's works, these works being one of the categories of Qur'anic teaching.

Al-Ghazālī offers examples involving medicine, astronomy and anatomy. He argues that it is impossible to understand the true meaning of a work of God which involves such disciplines unless one possesses the requisite knowledge. For example, al-Ghazālī quotes Abraham's words, 'And if I am sick, it is He who heals me' (Q26:80). With reference to healing he contends that, 'This single work can only be known by him who knows the science of medicine completely' (al-Ghazālī 1352:26; tr. 46). Although his explicit reference here is to a work of God, the entire discussion has in view the issue of the meaning, and by implication the interpretation, of relevant verses, as the following discussion demonstrates.

Al-Ghazālī quotes the words, 'O man, what deluded you concerning your Munificent Lord, who created you, fashioned you and made you well-wrought' (Q82:6–8). He then adds,

> The complete meaning *(kamāl ma'nā)* of God's words [i.e. in these verses]…can only be known by him who knows the anatomy of man's limbs and internal organs, their number, their kinds, their underlying wisdom, and their uses. God points to *(ishāra)* these in many places in the Qur'an.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:27; tr. 47, adapted)[9]

These remarks make it understandable that *Jawāhir* has become a well-known source cited in support of the type of interpretation known as 'scientific exegesis' or *tafsīr 'ilmī* (Jansen 1974:38). This interpretive approach assumes that the Qur'an refers indirectly to all modern scientific discoveries (Jansen 1974:35–54 gives examples). The prominent Egyptian scholar of the Qur'an, Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966) notes that although this line of thought has gained particular prominence since the last century, its principles, and opposition to them, can be found in writing of a much earlier period. He cites al-Ghazālī and *Jawāhir* as prominent in this regard (Jomier and Caspar 1957:272).

Al-Ghazālī seeks, by his comments on intellectual disciplines, to emphasise the centrality of the Qur'an as a source of knowledge. Paradoxically, however, his argument assumes the partial opaqueness of many verses to the vast majority of believers who are not, for example, medical doctors or astronomers. For al-Ghazālī, then, the Qur'an hints

at such scientific knowledge. Yet his theory renders interpretation more problematic, since the Qur'an does not, of course, also include a full account of any such science, but only the relevant principles. Al-Ghazālī does not attempt to integrate his discussion of knowledge and Qur'anic interpretation with his other ideas on methods or requirements for understanding the text. His purpose is to affirm a dogma—that the Qur'an lacks nothing—rather than to explore the epistemological ramifications of such a belief. However, in Chapter 5 we shall see how *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm* outlines further the manner in which the Qur'an might encompass all knowledge.

Chapters on the interpretation of important passages

As noted in Chapter 3, much of the theorising of *Jawāhir* is related explicitly or implicitly to al-Ghazālī's hierarchical classification of Qur'anic verses. It is thus no surprise that in his interpretations of important passages al-Ghazālī gives by far the greatest attention to texts chosen to show that the Qur'an justifies his classification.

Sūrat al-Fātiḥa

Al-Ghazālī states in *Jawāhir* that the six types of verse he has identified can be subdivided into ten types. These concern ten subjects found in the Qur'an. These are, 'The divine essence, divine attributes, divine works, the life to come, the straight path, i.e. the purification and beautification [of the soul], the conditions of the saints, the conditions of God's enemies, [His] argument with the infidels, and [finally] the bounds of legal judgements' (al-Ghazālī 1352:17; tr. 33). In discussing *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* he shapes his interpretation around this classification:

> Thus the Sura of Opening has comprised eight of the ten divisions [of the Qur'an]—divine essence, attributes and works, description of the life to come and of the straight path together with both its sides, i.e. purification [of the soul] and making it beautiful, description of [God's] favour to His friends and of His anger towards His enemies, and [finally] description of the resurrection.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:43; tr. 72)

Al-Ghazālī also takes aim at two disciplines he wishes to denigrate, namely theology and jurisprudence:

> Only two divisions [of the Qur'an] fall outside this sura, namely, God's argument with infidels and judgments of jurists—two subjects from which the sciences of theology *(kalām)* and jurisprudence *(fiqh)* stem off. From this it becomes clear that [in reality] these two subjects fall into the lowest of the grades of religious sciences. It is only the love of wealth and influence [obtainable by them] which has raised them to a higher status.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:43; tr. 72)

In examining how al-Ghazālī achieves a precise fit between the contents of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* and his classification of Qur'anic verses, his interpretation of the sura will be examined as he presents it, phrase by phrase. To enhance the clarity of the discussion Table 4.1 anticipates and summarises the results of this analysis. Note that al-Ghazālī discusses two Qur'anic phrases in reverse order, and correspondingly reverses the order of his presentation of the fifth and sixth categories of verse. In Table 4.1, these phrases and the verse categories corresponding to them are presented in accordance with the original Qur'anic order.

(1) 'In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful'. Al-Ghazālī states that these words, 'give information concerning his essence', the subject of the first of his types of Qur'anic verse. He does not state what this information is, but adds instead that the words *al-raḥman al-raḥīm* also inform us of one of God's special attributes, that which invokes *(tastad'ī)* all other attributes. The remainder of the discussion concerns attributes, the subject of the second type of verse. The mention of the attribute of mercy also has a powerful effect on those people on whom mercy has been bestowed, namely familiarising them with God, filling them with longing for him and encouraging them to obey him.

(2) 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds'. This phrase encompasses two components. One is gratitude, which is the basis of praise. Al-Ghazālī describes this as 'the beginning of the straight path', and in fact half of that path. (The other

Table 4.1 The division of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*

Al-Ghazālī's classification of verses	*Corresponding phrase in* Sūrat al-Fātiḥa
1 Divine essence	In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful
2 Divine attributes	The Beneficent, the Merciful
3 Divine works	Lord of the Worlds
4 The Life to come	Master of the Day of Judgment
5 Purification of the soul	Only You do we worship
6 Beautification of the soul	Only You do we implore for help
7 God's favour to his friends	The path of those You have favoured
8 God's anger toward his enemies	Not those who have incurred Your wrath or have gone astray

half of the path is patience, and al-Ghazālī refers his reader to Book XXXII of *Iḥyā', Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa'l-shukr;* see al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:59–138.) Gratitude occupies this exalted position because it proceeds from joy, not fear, and it is always preferable to be motivated by love rather than fear.[10] The second component identified by al-Ghazālī in this phrase is all of God's works and their relation to him. This relation is summed up in the idea of Lordship. Divine works are the third of al-Ghazālī's types of verse.

(3) 'The Compassionate, the Merciful'. The second occurrence of this phrase prompts al-Ghazālī to state that there is no repetition in the Qur'an. By this he means that any recurrence of a Qur'anic verse always yields additional benefit on each re-appearance and there is thus no vain repetition. Al-Ghazālī then explains that in this case the second mention of mercy adds nuances of meaning to the phrase immediately preceding it, reference to all the worlds, and to what follows it, that is, reference to the Day of Judgment. He then explains these nuances as follows.

The juxtaposition of the mention of mercy and the reference to the worlds is because mercy is apparent in God's creating the worlds. This is because 'He has created every one of these according to the most perfect and best of its kind and has given it everything it needs' (al-Ghazālī 1352:39; tr. 67). There follows a lengthy description of the ingenious design and capabilities of the gnat, fly, spider and bee.[11] Al-Ghazālī finds in these creatures signs of divine mercy, because in creation 'the lowest constitutes evidence of the highest' *(al-adanī bayyinat 'alā'l-a'la)* (al-Ghazālī 1352:41; tr. 69). This particular statement follows a tradition best exemplified by Galen.[12]

Al-Ghazālī here introduces into his interpretation of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* a brief reference to his belief that God has created the best of all possible worlds (see Ormsby 1984:32–51). The fullest exposition of the idea occurs in a passage from *Iḥyā'* Book XXXV, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul* (al-Ghazālī n.d. IV:252; tr. 47–8) and, as in much of his writing, al-Ghazālī is not original, drawing instead on a number of possible sources. The most prominent, as noted by Ormsby, is al-Makkī's *Qūt al-Qulūb* (al-Makkī 1351:III:52). Once more, however, the influence of Ibn Sīnā and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' is also likely to be at work. In *al-Shifā'* Ibn Sīnā writes that God, 'is by His very nature a cause of goodness and perfection insofar as possible and He wills it' (Ibn Sīnā 1960:II:415; tr. Ormsby 1984:82). Similarly the Ikhwān state that God, 'has arranged the world's affairs in the most excellent order, and its order in the perfection of wisdom' (Ikhwān 1957:IV:72–3; tr. Ormsby 1984:82).

In *Jawāhir* al-Ghazālī offers examples from the animal domain to demonstrate the perfection of the world as we find it. He compares the design of the gnat and the elephant, both possessing a long proboscis suited to their needs (al-Ghazālī 1352:41; tr. 68). Al-Ghazālī probably derives this illustration from *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* by the renowned author al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 254/868), where the same discussion occurs (al-Jāḥiẓ 1945:VII:169, as cited by Ormsby 1984:46). Al-Ghazālī also draws attention to the bee's great skill in producing hexagonal shapes in honeycombs, shapes perfectly suited to the bee's requirements despite its lack of awareness of the superiority of such a shape for its purposes. This discussion also occurs in *Iqtiṣād* (al-Ghazālī 1962:88–90; tr. Marmura 1994:304–5).

Al-Ghazālī's view that the world we inhabit is the best possible design, touched on so briefly in *Jawāhir,* but also found in others of his works, led to a storm of protest in succeeding centuries on account of its apparent infringement of God's omnipotence and freedom of choice. Al-Ghazālī's stance has recently been cited as another example of his following Ibn Sīnā rather than Ash'arism (Frank 1992:60–3), and Ormsby (1984:34) gives a detailed account of defenders and critics of al-Ghazālī on this score. The key point for the purpose of this study, however, is that by referring briefly in *Jawāhir* to the

issue of the perfection of the world, al-Ghazālī introduces into his interpretation of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* a theological theme found in several of his other works.

As noted earlier, according to al-Ghazālī the mention of mercy colours not only the phrase preceding it, but also influences reception of what immediately follows it, reference to the Day of Judgment. Here the juxtaposition is said to underline the role of God's mercy in allowing into Paradise those who accept the creed and formal worship of Islam.[13]

(4) 'Master of the Day of Judgment'. These words receive only brief attention. They are an allusion to the life to come, the fourth of al-Ghazālī's types of Qur'anic verses. They are also an indication of the meaning of kingship and master which are among the attributes of divine glory.

(5) 'Only you do we worship'. For al-Ghazālī this phrase draws attention to two points. One is the need for sincere worship, which al-Ghazālī terms the spirit of the straight path.[14] This path encompasses the fifth and sixth types of Qur'anic verse, those encouraging the purification and beautification of the soul. The second point in this phrase is *tawḥīd*, described here as the belief that none other than God deserves worship. Al-Ghazālī then advances his view that *tawḥīd* is achieved by, 'Abandonment of belief in [man's] ability and power, and by the knowledge that God is alone in [the execution of] all works and that man is not independent by himself and without his help' (al-Ghazālī 1352:42; tr. 70–1).

Al-Ghazālī's statement that God is 'alone in all works' *(munfarid bi'l-af'āl kullihā)* is an assertion that God, not human beings, is the agent of all actions, despite the appearance of our exercising agency. This is a view which he expounds in *Iqtiṣād*, and which opposes the Mu'tazilite view that human beings create their own deeds (see al-Ghazālī 1962:80–99; tr. Marmura 1994). Al-Ghazālī once again grasps the opportunity to introduce what he considers to be an important theological affirmation—that God is the author of all acts—into his interpretation of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*. This interpretation of worship and sincerity involves 'making the soul beautiful', the sixth of the ten types of verse he finds in the Qur'an, discussed prior to the fifth.

(6) 'Only you do we implore for help'. According to al-Ghazālī this phrase alludes to purification from belief in partnership *(shirk)* and from giving attention to man's ability and power. This purification of the soul is the fifth of the ten types of Qur'anic verse. Following reference to this fifth type, al-Ghazālī then summarises his comments on this phrase and the preceding one, stressing that together they refer to the purification and beautification of the soul outlined in his classification of verses. This analysis, linking these two phrases to the straight path, enables al-Ghazālī to connect his comments to the next line of the Qur'anic text.

(7) 'Lead us to the right path'. Al-Ghazālī describes this phrase as, 'a prayer which is the marrow of worship',[15] and comments that the prayer highlights two points. First, it reminds the believer of the need to pray, and second, it emphasises that a person's paramount need is guidance along the straight path.

(8) 'The path of those You have favoured not those who have incurred your wrath or have gone astray'. These phrases cover al-Ghazālī's seventh and eighth types of verses, the conditions of the saints and of God's enemies. According to al-Ghazālī they engender both encouragement and awe in the believer.[16] In addition they are a reminder of the

division between those whom God has favoured and those who deny or oppose God. Al-Ghazālī refers to the former as 'the prophets', although he does not make clear whether he aims to limit the definition of 'those you have favoured' to the prophets alone.

As Table 4.1 and the discussion so far have demonstrated, al-Ghazālī finds in *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* a justification for his classification of Qur'anic verse types. In addition to this, al-Ghazālī also offers two other brief discussions of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* in the course of *Jawāhir*. These could have been discussed in the previous section of this chapter as isolated interpretations, but instead are included here so as more easily to provide a complete picture of what al-Ghazālī states regarding *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*.

The first of these two brief treatments is based on an unidentified saying of Muhammad which, according to al-Ghazālī, states that 'the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* is the key to Paradise' (al-Ghazālī 1352:43–4; tr. 73–4). Al-Ghazālī draws on this statement to emphasise his view, already outlined, that there are eight types of utterance in the sura. Each one of these, he maintains, is a key to one of the doors of the Paradise of the *'ārifūn*. Presenting the same bi-partite understanding of Paradise as discussed earlier in this chapter, al-Ghazālī argues that this Paradise of the *'ārifūn* is far superior to Paradise as conceived by the majority, for whom it is a place for satisfying physical appetites.

Later in *Jawāhir* al-Ghazālī adds one further brief comment on *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (al-Ghazālī 1352:52; tr. 87). He remarks that the first half of the sura comprises jewels, that is, verses relevant to knowledge of God, while the second half consists of pearls, verses concerned with following the straight path. This division of religious teaching into theoretical and practical parts is based on an Aristotelian approach to knowledge which occurs in a number of al-Ghazālī's works (Gil'adi 1989). The most likely source for this is Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī's primary Aristotelian influence. Ibn Sīnā describes this division in his short work *Fī aqsām al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya* (Ibn Sīnā 1908). Here he mentions that an example of the theoretical part of knowledge is *tawḥīd*, the knowledge of God's oneness, while the purpose of the practical part is forming an opinion for the sake of action. 'Therefore, the end of the theoretical part is truth, and the end of the practical is the good' (Ibn Sīnā 1908:105; tr. 96). This description corresponds to al-Ghazālī's division of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, although al-Ghazālī has transposed the second Aristotelian category, the practical, more fully than Ibn Sīnā into Islamic terminology, recasting good acts as knowledge of the straight path (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm)*.

This comment of al-Ghazālī's on the structure of *Sūrat al-Fātiha* introduces the extensive list of Qur'anic verses which forms the second part of *Jawāhir*. Like the sura, this list is also divided into jewels, or verses relevant to the knowledge of God, and pearls, verses concerned with following the straight path. Hence the structure of Part Two of *Jawāhir* is also shaped by the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge (Gil'adi 1989:90).

There are, then, three elements to al-Ghazālī's interpretation of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* in *Jawāhir*. All three depend on analysing not only the words, but also the structure of the sura. The principal discussion identifies eight types of verse, an analysis which accords with al-Ghazālī's classification found earlier in *Jawāhir,* and discussed in Chapter 3. As part of this discussion, there is frequent indirect or direct reference to al-Ghazālī's theological views on a range of topics, including, most importantly, the perfection of the

world and the divine agency of all actions, as well as God's mercy in judgement, and the need for gratitude, love and prayer. The second aspect of al-Ghazālī's discussion of the sura is based on this eight-fold division of elements. Al-Ghazālī argues, on the basis of a hadith stating that there are eight doors to Paradise, that *Sūrat* *al-Fātiḥa* is the key to these doors. Third, al-Ghazālī's division of the sura into two parts, comprising theoretical and practical elements, reflects Aristotelian influence, most probably also absorbed through Ibn Sīnā.

The Throne Verse (Q2:255)

The Throne Verse has been the subject of much exegetical energy (see Ayoub 1984:247–52), and al-Ghazālī devotes his next short chapter to it (al-Ghazālī 1352:45–7; tr. 75–8). The verse reads as follows:

> Allah! There is no God but he, the Living, the Everlasting. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes him. His is what is in the heavens and on the earth. Who shall intercede with Him except with His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them. And they do not comprehend of his knowledge except what He wills. His throne encompasses the heavens and the earth, and their preservation does not burden Him. He is the Exalted, the Great.

Al-Ghazālī's discussion of this verse consists of an explanation of an unidentified hadith which states, 'The Verse of the Throne is the chief *(sayyida)* of Qur'anic verses'. Al-Ghazālī explains the hadith (al-Ghazālī 1352:16–17; tr. 32–3) as he explained *Sūrat* *al-Fātiḥa*, by means of his classification of verses outlined earlier in *Jawāhir*. His hierarchical scheme locates knowledge of God, that is, of his essence, attributes and works, as the highest form of knowledge. Al-Ghazālī contends that since the Throne Verse is concerned exclusively with these three types of knowledge it deserves the title of the chief of Qur'anic verses. He then offers a phrase by-phrase-interpretation of the verse. In what follows, this interpretation is not divided into sub-sections, as in the discussion of *Sūrat* *al-Fātiḥa*, since some of al-Ghazālī's comments are very brief.

First, the occurrence of the word 'God' indicates his essence. Al-Ghazālī then discusses the next phrase, 'There is no God but He' in terms of *tawḥīd*. These phrases are 'an indication of the unity of his essence'. The description 'the alive the eternal *(al-ḥayy al-qayyūm)* indicates that God is not dependent on anything for his existence, while all other things are sustained by him. Thus he is the only necessary rather than contingent being, in the sense that he is the only being which exists 'through itself' (Davidson 1979:166).[17] This aspect of God's existence is central to al-Ghazālī's understanding of God's utter uniqueness, as is evident when he emphasises that 'this is the ultimate of glory and greatness' (al-Ghazālī 1352:45; tr. 76).

The phrase 'Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes him' shows us, according to al-Ghazālī, that God is free from the attributes of accidents, since these are impossible in his case. Once again al-Ghazālī emphasises God's utter difference from creation in every respect.[18] The phrase 'His is what is in the heavens and on the earth' is a reference to all

God's works, and that all these have their origin in him and return to him. This repeats al-Ghazālī's belief in God's origination of all acts, also asserted in his interpretation of the phrase 'Only You do we worship' from *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, discussed before this. The phrase 'Who shall intercede with Him except with His leave?' concerns God's sole sovereignty over granting the right of intercession. This is in part a negation of *shirk,* or associating anything with God.

The statement 'He knows what is before them and what is behind them. And they do not comprehend of His knowledge except what He will' treats God's attribute of knowledge, and that all knowledge is given as a gift in accordance with His will, rather than being gained independently of Him. The phrase, 'His throne encompasses the heavens and the earth' indicates his sovereignty and perfect power. However, writes al-Ghazālī, there is in this concept of God's throne a secret which cannot be known, since 'knowledge of the throne, of its attributes and of the wideness of the heavens and the earth' (al-Ghazālī: 46; tr. 76) is a special form of knowledge with which much other knowledge is bound up. Al-Ghazālī here refers indirectly to the controversy over whether the reference to God's throne should be understood literally or figuratively.

The phrase 'Their preservation does not burden Him' refers to the divine attributes of power and perfection. For discussion of the phrase 'He is the Exalted, the Great' al-Ghazālī refers the reader to *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā,* stating that he lacks space in *Jawāhir* to discuss these two attributes.[19] Al-Ghazālī then concludes his chapter on the Throne Verse with brief reference to other parts of the Qur'an which contain some of the merits of the Throne Verse. These verses, however—and they include *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*—do not concentrate the most important elements of the Qur'an in one verse as the Throne Verse does.[20]

In his interpretation of the Throne Verse al-Ghazālī touches on the issues of God's uncaused and therefore necessary existence, freedom from the attributes of accidents, God's origination of all actions, and a statement to the effect that the understanding of God's Throne must remain a mystery. As in his interpretation of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, al-Ghazālī's exploration of the Throne Verse is not so much exegesis as a series of references to some of his favourite theological views.

Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ *(Q112)*

This short sura reads, 'Say: He is Allah, the only One, Allah the Everlasting. He did not beget and is not begotten. And none is His equal.' Al-Ghazālī argues that this sura is equal to one-third of the Qur'an, drawing on the hadith, 'Say: "He is God, the One" is equal to a third of the Qur'an' (al-Ghazālī 1352:47: tr. 79, and cf., for example, al-Bukhari 1976:VI:6: hadith 533).[21] He explains this statement by reference to his own categorisation of Qur'anic material. This time he draws on his division of verses into 6, rather than 10 categories, wherein knowledge of God's essence, attributes and works is regarded as one category, knowledge of God, rather than three separate categories (al-Ghazālī 1352:10–17; tr. 23–33). Knowledge of God is the first of the 3 categories which he considers the most important, the others being knowledge of the next world and of the straight path. *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* deals with knowledge of God, the first of these, and therefore represents one-third of the value of the Qur'an since it addresses one-third of

the most important concerns of the Qur'an. In the first two verses the sura asserts God's unity, and the view that only he can meet human needs. The final two verses eliminate the possibility of origin, branch and equality of any other being with God. His attribute of being 'the Everlasting' also informs people that only God can meet needs. Al-Ghazālī's emphasis on God's oneness and self-sufficiency introduces nothing new or unusual to *Jawāhir*. Rather, al-Ghazālī once again backs up his earlier classification of verses by means of a Qur'anic example.

Conclusion

Four points can be drawn from al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic interpretations in *Jawāhir*. First, he uses Qur'anic interpretation to justify his hermeneutical theory of Qur'anic verse types. Second, he employs his interpretations of short individual verses, and of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* and the Throne Verse, as opportunities to introduce his views on various theological topics which he considers important. These include the Paradisal experience of the *'ārifūn,* the need for *ta'wīl,* the presence in the Qur'an of the principles of every intellectual discipline, God's necessary being, an argument for this world being the best of all possible worlds, and God's origination of all acts. He refrains, however, from giving his view on one of the most controversial subjects he raises, the nature of the throne.

Third, al-Ghazālī tends to explain hadiths in accordance with principles which he had earlier derived from his classification of Qur'anic verses. The hadiths employed are not the foundation on which he builds his classifications of Qur'anic material, but are introduced to support these classifications.

Fourth, in defending his approach to the Qur'an, al-Ghazālī is not averse to drawing on a number of sources of support which go unnamed, but certain of whose ideas he would in other contexts disavow. The most prominent of these sources are the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and the work of Ibn Sīnā.

In Chapter Seventeen of *Jawāhir,* immediately following his chapters on particular Qur'anic passages, al-Ghazālī defends the right of the Prophet to identify particular parts of the Qur'an as the most excellent. After asserting Muhammad's complete trustworthiness, he writes in defence of his own prioritising of particular passages as follows:

> Then be mindful of this kind of freedom in dealing with the striking verses of the Qur'an and of what will follow this, in order that your knowledge may be abundant and your mind opened, in which case you will see wonders and signs and be delighted in the Paradise of different kinds of knowledge *(ma'rifa)*.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1352:49; tr. 83, adapted)

This statement suggests that such knowledge is elusive and requires a 'mind opened' in a particular way. It also implies that *Jawāhir* is an attempt to demonstrate the method or path to the acquisition of such knowledge. However, as already noted, al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic interpretations in *Jawāhir* actually advance ideas found elsewhere in his

writings. Despite the underlying assumption of the importance of seeking an inner meaning for Qur'anic verses, in practice no Sufi or other esoteric framework of thought influences the actual interpretations presented in *Jawāhir*. Al-Ghazālī uses the hadiths he cites to confirm the truth of knowledge which he in fact offers to the reader via his classification of the different elements of the Qur'an.

Al-Ghazālī's classification of verses is the only new feature in *Jawāhir*. More than other elements in al-Ghazālī's text, this classification must therefore bear the weight of his opening claims, quoted at the beginning of the present chapter, 'to guide you to the manner of these people' who, 'sail to the midst of the fathomless ocean of these meanings in order to see their wonders' (al-Ghazālī 1352:8–9; tr. 19–20). The verse classification of *Jawāhir* does not attempt to guide in this way by introducing, for example, a range of new or speculative interpretations. On the contrary, as is evident to those familiar with al-Ghazālī's other writings, *Jawāhir* leads the reader on a tour of al-Ghazālī's existing theological interests.

5
Syllogisms as the steps to heaven
Al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm

Introduction

The translation movement initiated by the early ‘Abbāsid caliphs led to the introduction of Greek classical texts, including those on logic and other aspects of philosophy, into the milieu of early Islam (see Gutas 1998). The role played by Greek logic in Muslim intellectual life gradually increased over the centuries, and the historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), sums up al-Ghazālī’s pivotal role in this process in the following passage.

> The early theologians vehemently disapproved of the study of logic and considered it innovation or unbelief… However, recent theologians since al-Ghazzālī…decided that logic is not in contradiction with articles of faith, even though it is in contradiction to some of the arguments for them.
>
> (Ibn Khaldun 1958:3:146)

The question of the level of this disapproval is discussed in the following pages. This chapter examines a text, *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm (The Correct Balance)* (al-Ghazālī 1353), which al-Ghazālī clearly felt had a role to play in bringing about this change of attitude, since it links logic with the bedrock of Muslim presuppositions, the Qur’an.[1] Although al-Ghazālī is well-known for writing on logic in a number of works, mentioned later, *Qisṭās* is unique in its focus on the Qur’an.

In *Qisṭās* al-Ghazālī seeks to demonstrate that syllogistic logic is found in the Qur’an, and is therefore a legitimate tool for use by Muslim theologians. This logic, to be discussed in detail shortly, comprises variations on the basic form ‘All A is B; all B is C; therefore all A is C’. In other words, al-Ghazālī wishes to show that revelation and reason do not conflict because revelation incorporates reason. He takes his title phrase *‘al-qisṭās al-mustaqīm’* from the Qur’an (Q17:35 and 26:182), in order to emphasise that the subject matter is indeed Qur’anic. The present chapter has two main aims. First, it will explore what prompted al-Ghazālī to use the Qur’an in support of syllogistic logic. This locates the specific Qur’anic interpretations which he provides in the context of the thought of al-Ghazālī and of his predecessors. This exploration requires considerable discussion of the purpose of *Qisṭās.* The second aim is to examine the Qur’anic interpretations which al-Ghazālī presents as evidence for his argument. The discussion in the following pages is structured around three aspects of al-Ghazālī’s own presentation in *Qisṭās.* Al-Ghazālī converts some Qur’anic verses into syllogistic form. Second, he

draws on a number of other verses in support of his case for the Qur'anic vindication of logic. Both groups of verses are considered here, and, third, the present chapter also seeks to identify the hermeneutical framework within which al-Ghazālī presents his chosen verses, and to compare this framework and its use to those in other works by al-Ghazālī.

Four questions underlie the present discussion. First, what is al-Ghazālī's principal reason for writing *Qisṭās?* Second, what is to be made of the accuracy, plausibility and sincerity of al-Ghazālī's interpretations when he finds examples of syllogistic logic, or references to such logic, in Qur'anic texts? Third, what hermeneutical framework is presented, and, fourth, how does *Qisṭās* understand the Qur'an to provide certain knowledge? The focus of the chapter is thus specifically on issues relating to the Qur'anic material in *Qisṭās,* rather than on wider discussion of logic except where it is relevant to al-Ghazālī's use of the Qur'an.

Early in *Qisṭās* al-Ghazālī warns his interlocutor regarding *ta'wīl* and the correct understanding of the term 'balance' in the Qur'an, 'So fear God and do not interpret arbitrarily' (al-Ghazālī 1353:158; tr. 289). However, the limited number of scholars who have made *Qisṭās* the subject of their attention characteristically regard al-Ghazālī's own interpretations in this work as bordering on the arbitrary. Watt calls the interpretations 'somewhat forced' and asks of the exposition of the first figure of the categorical syllogism, 'Why should a man like al-Ghazālī, capable of writing a full technical exposition of Aristotelian logic, spend time on trivialities of this kind?' (Watt 1963:69–70).[2] Watt's question will be addressed later in this chapter. Kleinknecht (1972) takes a more positive view, but the appraisal which is both most recent and most positive comes from Gwynne (2004). Writing in the context of rising interest in the forms of Qur'anic argument (see, for example McAuliffe 1999), Gwynne notes that her own work was inspired by *Qisṭās* (Gwynne 2004:ix). For Gwynne, al-Ghazālī's 'recasting' of Qur'anic passages into 'inference schemata' 'adheres more closely to the text than do many works of Qur'anic exegesis'.

> Ghazali had consciously grasped what most others had not: that the Qur'an does not present its content as self-evidently significant but frames it in patterns of argument to show just how that material engages the hearer and the reader.
>
> (Gwynne 2004:ix)

In the light of this recent rehabilitation of *Qisṭās* it is timely to scrutinise the text, and also to set it in the context of al-Ghazālī's wider concerns. As will become apparent, it is by no means the anomaly it has sometimes been considered.

It is difficult to determine an exact date of composition, but *Qisṭās* mentions *Jawāhir,* and is itself mentioned in *Fayṣal, Munqidh* and *Iljām*. Kleinknecht (1972:159), citing Bouyges, assumes a date of 497/1103, although Bouyges himself is less specific, stating only that a date before al-Ghazālī's return to teaching in Nishapur in 1106 is probable (Bouyges 1959:57). Hourani (1984:300) offers no specific date, but the placement of *Qisṭās* in his list of al-Ghazālī's works would fit a date before 1106. While

there is thus some consensus, these dates must be regarded as provisional until firmer evidence emerges.

The purpose of *Qisṭās*

Watt's answer to his own question, concerning what led al-Ghazālī to 'spend time on trivialities of this kind' is that *Qisṭās* is written to explain logic to those incapable of fully grasping the subject in any other way (Watt 1963:27). This solution needs questioning, however, and the issue will be probed on two levels. First, which was al-Ghazālī's principal goal in writing *Qisṭās*, the promotion of logic or the refutation of Ismā'īlī thought? The answer to this influences the response to the second question, regarding what provides his underlying motivation in taking on such a concern. These two questions repay careful attention.

The question of al-Ghazālī's principal purpose is complicated by the fact that *Qisṭās* has two different sets of opponents in view. One of the two groups consisted of those who already supported, or were considering support for the Ismā'īlīs.[3] The other possible opponents were those who opposed or ignored the use of syllogistic logic, as many theologians and jurists did. Al-Ghazālī aims to convince this group of the Qur'anic basis of syllogisms. But which group was his primary concern?

Certain aspects of *Qisṭās* might lead to the conclusion that the Ismā'īlīs were al-Ghazālī's prime target. The work is composed as a debate between the author and a member of a sect which al-Ghazālī terms *ahl al-ta'līm* or 'People of Authoritative Teaching' (al-Ghazālī 1353:156; tr. 287). This group is identified by al-Ghazālī's hypothetical interlocutor as the Ismā'ilīs of Alamūt, or Nizārīs, led by Ḥaṣan-i Ṣabbāḥ. He refers to, 'our master, the lord of the stronghold of Alamut' (al-Ghazālī 1353:178; tr. 309). This group was characterised by authoritarian leadership and opposition to the Sunni Saljuqs, opposition which could involve assassinating important figures.[4] No record survives of Ḥasan's teaching from his own hand, but a summary is preserved in the well-known heresiography of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), *Kitāb al-milal wa 'l-niḥal* (al-Shahrastānī 1368: I:339–45; tr. 1984:167–70; also tr. Hodgson 1955: 325–8, and discussed on 54–7). As a result, historians are dependent on the integrity of al-Shahrastānī's account, in which he clearly disapproves of Ḥasan-i Sabbāḥ, despite his sympathies for the other, non-Nizārī form of Isma'īlīsm (al-Shahrastānī 2001:4–5). Al-Shahrastānī states that he has translated a Persian account of the *ta'līm* into Arabic for his readers, and presents the following as its main points. First, Ḥasan asserts the need for a teacher, rather than reliance on reason, in order to understand religious truths. Second, there must be only one teacher, not several. Third, the teacher must be accepted without being able to demonstrate his reliability. Fourth, in answer to the dilemma raised by the third, the authority of the teacher could be known through the existence of the imām for whom he speaks (Daftary 1990:369–70). This is because once the logic of the first three points is accepted, then in relation to the imām,

> The very nature of his claims are his own proof. He offers himself as fulfilling and in turn making intelligible the need of men for an imām, which is up against a blank wall until the imām presents himself in this particular logical relationship, and by his existence makes everything clear.
>
> (Hodgson 1955:56)

Al-Ghazālī was undeniably concerned to show that without Ismā'īlī thought there is no such 'blank wall', and anti-Isma'īlī writing is a prominent strand of his work, notably in *Fadā'ih*.[5] Opposition to the Ismā'īlīs is also clearly evident in *Qisṭās*, so much so that Brewster, in the introduction to his translation of the text, comments that in comparison to the refutation of Ismā'īlī teaching, the promotion of logic is 'a subsidiary theme', albeit 'of considerable importance' (al-Ghazālī 1353; tr. Brewster: xx). Furthermore, al-Ghazālī's opposition to Ismā'īlī ideas acquires added prominence from his decision to structure *Qisṭās* as a debate with an Ismā'īlī representative. The debate form appears to have had no precedent in Arabic logical writings, so al-Ghazālī took advantage of the lack of any prescribed genre for logical works by borrowing from *kalām* the form of the disputation (*munāẓara*) to dramatise his criticisms of the Ismā'īlīs (Gutas 1993:31).[6]

However, although *Qisṭās* is evidently written in part as an ideological offensive against the Ismā'īlīs, the importance of this purpose of the work should not be overstated. Al-Ghazālī makes clear where his priorities lie in his conclusion to *Qisṭās*. First he expresses the hope that others might 'Find profit in the contents of these conversations by the comprehension of things more sublime than the correction of the doctrine of the devotees of *ta'lim*' (*Qisṭās*: 202; tr. 331). This remark would seem to put it beyond doubt that justifying the acceptability of syllogistic logic within Islamic theology is the principal aim of *Qisṭās*. Second, he concentrates in his conclusion entirely on remarks which emphasise his method of presenting logic in an unusual way, rather than on the Ismā'īlīs directly. He states regarding his method and arguments, 'Beware of changing this order, and of stripping these ideas of this apparel!' (*Qisṭās*: 202; tr. 331).

The frequent attention which al-Ghazālī pays to logic in other works is not in itself proof that it is the main concern of *Qisṭās*. However, such attention does provide corroborating evidence to support the view that promoting syllogistic logic is his primary concern. Al-Ghazālī's interest in logic first emerges in the logical sections of *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa,* his summary or interpretive translation of Ibn Sīnā's *Dānesh Nāmeh* (al-Ghazālī 1912:1–71).[7] Logic is then exempted from his criticisms of the philosophers in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (al-Ghazālī 1997:8–10). Al-Ghazālī provides an exposition of essentially Avicennan logic in *Mi'yar al-'ilm* (al-Ghazālī 1964b) and *Miḥakk al-naẓar* (al-Ghazālī 1966) while there is discussion and use of syllogisms in *Iqtiṣād* (al-Ghazālī 1962:15–20 and *passim*). After the distinctive treatment of logic in *Qisṭās*, *Munqidh* makes two statements concerning the subject. One is that the philosophers' logic differs from that used by theologians only in its terminology and in its greater detail. Second, logic is a neutral tool which presupposes no prior commitment to any particular view of

God and the world (al-Ghazālī 1959:22; tr. 74–5).[8] Finally, al-Ghazālī argues for the importance of logic in the introduction to *Mustaṣfā* (al-Ghazālī 1322–4: I:10–55), a discussion largely copied from *Miḥakk* (Janssens 2003:71).[9] *Qisṭās*, then, while al-Ghazālī's only attempt to argue for the Qur'anic basis of logic, is a particular expression of his general interest in the subject, a subject which clearly preoccupied him over much of his career.

The syllogistic logic which al-Ghazālī advocates contrasts with the logic of the *mutakallimūn,* who preferred to argue from assumptions based in revelation and tradition rather than a priori reasoning (Goodman 1992:194). The three main types of reasoning in *kalām* were induction, analogy and the example, a form of analogy. All of these were dialectical, that is, based on generally accepted opinions rather than demonstrative certainty (Gyekye 1989:136; see also van Ess 1970). Induction involves inferring that a property found in some types of a category applies to all members of that category. For example, if every type of exercise which is analysed strengthens the muscles, it is concluded that 'all exercise strengthens the muscles' is a true statement, even if there might be some form of exercise not yet known and analysed. So a complete or incomplete sample can be used. Second analogy, often known as transfer *(nuqla)* entails inference *(istidlāl)* of the hidden from the evident *(qiyās al-ghā'ib 'alā'l-shāhid),* in which a common quality is considered to be shared by two things. For example, all created things have a maker, so, since the world is created, it too must have a maker. Gyekye describes the example, the third main type of *kalām* reasoning, as follows: if x and y are both C, and if x is a D because it is a C, then y is also a D (Gyekye 1989:142).

> *Kalām* logic, then, will never pretend to state a priori what can or cannot happen in the world. Rather, it must work from hypothetical: 'Given this, our expectation would be that'…in a world radically dependent on discrete and ultimately arbitrary acts of grace, little, perhaps nothing, remains for the critical 'always' and 'never' to govern. Every event is now thought of historically rather than generically or specifically.
>
> (Goodman 1992:193)

Regarding events in this world as dependent on acts of grace made the *mutakallimūn* wary of Aristotelian logic's assumption of fixed laws. Al-Ghazālī, however, set himself the task, in *Qisṭās* and other works, of advancing syllogistic logic while never abandoning Ash'arite occasionalism for Aristotelian essential causes.[10]

The conclusion that the principal purpose of *Qisṭās* is to commend syllogistic logic to scholars hostile to it calls into question Watt's discussion of the target audience of *Qisṭās*. Watt suggests that al-Ghazālī writes for the less educated section of the populace, who could not cope with the full complexity of logic. For Watt, explaining logic to those who could not understand it is the prompt for al-Ghazālī to 'spend time on trivialities of this kind' (Watt 1963:70). However, a relatively uneducated audience for *Qisṭās* is unlikely given both the degree of complexity found in the text, and al-Ghazālī's references to the elite *(khawwāṣṣ)*, and the common people *('awāmm)* (al-Ghazālī 1353:189; tr. 318). Since al-Ghazālī's aim is to explain the means of

persuading the elite (by syllogistic logic), there seems little reason for him to explain this to people whom he deems unable to comprehend such a method of approach. The present chapter will therefore assume that *Qisṭās* is aimed at changing the minds of those Muslim scholars who held a negative view of syllogistic logic.

While al-Ghazālī's support for logic, rather than condemnation of the Ismā'īlīs, is the principal aim of *Qisṭās*, the two are closely related. For al-Ghazālī, the authority of the Ismā'īlī infallible teacher as a source of certain knowledge is replaced by the authority of Muhammad, since he was the bringer of the Qur'an, which is a source of certain knowledge because of its use of syllogisms. So al-Ghazālī uses the strategy of borrowing one of his opponent's central ideas and then redefining it to serve his own argument. He accepts the Ismā'īlī category of the authoritative teacher, but argues that Muhammad is the rightful holder of such a title. That authority, while ultimately from God, is demonstrated in part in the Qur'an's incorporating what for al-Ghazālī, is the most authoritative form of argument—the syllogism.

The central role of the syllogism in *Qisṭās* can be seen in the way that al-Ghazālī implicitly and explicitly relates *Qisṭās* to *Jawāhir*. As noted in Chapter 4, al-Ghazālī states in *Jawāhir* that the principles of all branches of knowledge are contained in some way in the Qur'an. In *Qisṭās* he writes, 'All sciences *('ulūm)* are not present in the Qur'an explicitly, but they are present in it potentially *(bi'l-quwwa)* because of what it contains of the just balances by means of which the doors of limitless wisdom are opened' (al-Ghazālī 1353:195; tr. 324, adapted). 'Just balances' here refers to various forms of the syllogism. For al-Ghazālī, this presence of the balances in the Qur'an is the means by which it potentially incorporates all knowledge, as mentioned in the verse, 'Nor anything green or dry, but is in a Clear Book' (Q6:59).

There are also statements which link *Qisṭās* and *Jawāhir* explicitly. These introduce the relationship of the 'keys' of *Jawāhir,* that is, propositions, and the 'balances' of *Qisṭās*, that is, syllogisms which combine such propositions to produce a conclusion. 'And just as in the Qur'an there are the balances of all the sciences, so also in it are the keys of all the sciences—as I have indicated in [my] book *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān'* (al-Ghazālī 1353:177; tr. 308). Men of insight, who understand syllogistic logic

> Know by the like of this method the veracity of the Apostle and the truth of the Qur'an, as I have mentioned to you, and take from it the keys of all the sciences along with the balances, as I have mentioned in [my] book *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1353:195; tr. 325)

The following remark indirectly sheds light on al-Ghazālī's views on the relationship of the keys and the balances.

> The clear primary cognitions *('ulūm)* are the principles [for knowing] of the obscure and hidden cognitions and they are their seeds. But they are to be exploited by one who is expert in exploiting by cultivation and producing in bringing about coupling between them.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1353:165–6; tr. 296, adapted)

In this passage al-Ghazālī refers to propositions as seeds. They can develop into further knowledge if they are cultivated in the right way, that is, by coupling them through syllogistic logic. 'Cultivation and producing in bringing about coupling between them' *(al-istithmār bi'l-harātha wa'l-istintāj bi'l-īqā' al-azdawāj baynahumā)* refers to the deployment of syllogistic logic. The potentiality of the text is referred to as seeds needing cultivation, but al-Ghazālī could equally have used the image of keys needing turning. In using the term *istithmār* to describe the use of syllogisms, al-Ghazālī, perhaps deliberately, borrows a term used in the literature of *uṣūl al-fiqh,* and which he uses in *Mustaṣfā,* which employs the language of cultivation as a metaphor for the formulation of the law (Weiss 1998:22, 89. Cf. al-Ghazālī 1322–4:I:7). It is thus possible that in using the term *istithmār,* al-Ghazālī seeks to enhance the Islamic credentials of syllogistic logic by associating it with the unquestionably Islamic discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

If the promotion of logic was al-Ghazālī's primary aim, what were his reasons for making this his target? A brief review of differing Muslim attitudes to Greek logic at the time of al-Ghazālī's writing will illuminate his motives for promoting logic in Qur'anic terms.

Logic *(manṭiq)* was amongst the disciplines known by Muslim writers as *'ulūm al-awā'il* ('sciences of the ancients'), or also *'ulūm al-qudamā'* or *al-'ulūm al-qadīma* (Goldziher 1981:185). These included medicine, astrology, arithmetic, geometry and music. Until recently, the account given by Goldziher of the attitude of Muslim scholars towards logic and the other disciplines has been widely accepted. Rescher (1964:40) terms it 'the classic study', while Gutas (1998:166), in critiquing it, notes that 'it has been constantly referred to as the expert opinion on the subject'. Goldziher portrays a widespread negative reaction to these Greek disciplines on the part of a supposed 'Islamic orthodoxy', with only a few exceptional figures accepting and seeking to promote logic and the other disciplines. Gutas, however, challenges the idea of any such unified 'orthodoxy', and details how the various hostile reactions to logic recorded by Goldziher can be explained by specific historical circumstances which gave rise to particularly negative reactions. Gutas therefore posits a current of support for the ancient sciences greater than that portrayed by Goldziher.

Gutas' view notwithstanding, the existence of advocates for logic indicates the existence of some opposition to it. A detailed study of the socio-political influences on the intellectual currents of al-Ghazālī's period remains to be written, but at least some suspicion of Greek sciences in general can be assumed as the context for al-Ghazālī's defence of mathematics in both *Tahāfut* (al-Ghazālī 1997:8–9) and *Munqidh* (al-Ghazālī 1959:20–1; tr. 73). *Qisṭās* certainly indicates al-Ghazālī's perception of the need for greater acceptance in religious circles of syllogistic rather than *kalām* logic.

In addition to the negative stimulus of a climate hostile towards logic, was there a positive precedent in the writings of predecessors for al-Ghazālī's attempt to promote

syllogisms in Islamic terms? Some precursors can be identified, although lines of influence are difficult to trace. Forerunners in a general sense, in their support of philosophy, include al-Tawḥīdī's *Risāla fī'l-'ulūm* and al-'Āmirī's *I'lām bi-manāqib al-Islām,* which expound the benefits of philosophy for religion.[11] Furthermore, some writers attempt to present philosophy as belonging to an Arab or, like al-Ghazālī, an Islamic heritage. Al-Kindī (d. shortly after 256/870) devised a genealogy purporting to show that the Greek sciences were in fact Arab in origin, since the originators of the Greek and Arab races were brothers.[12] Al-Fārābī apparently composed a work, no longer extant, comprising a defence of logic based on sayings of the Prophet (Goldziher 1981:188).

One notable precursor of al-Ghazālī was the Andalusian Ibn Ḥazm (384–456/994–1064). His *al-Taqrib li-ḥadd al-manṭiq (Outline of the Limits of Logic)* commends logic, although Ibn Ḥazm's purpose is solely to enhance the practice of theology (Ibn Ḥazm 1959).[13] Ibn Ḥazm's intention regarding unfamiliar expressions was to 'present the meaning of these in terms that are easy and straightforward to understand' (Ibn Ḥazm 1959:6; tr. Gutas 1988:270), a purpose which al-Ghazālī would doubtless have endorsed. However, it is not known whether al-Ghazālī was familiar with Ibn Ḥazm's logical writings, although there is a general reference to Ibn Ḥazm in *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā* (al-Ghazālī 1971a:190; tr. 175–6).

Al-Ghazālī's designation of logic as a 'balance' was not original. For example, the term *mīzān* is used to denote logic in the debate in Baghdad in 320/932 on the merits of logic and grammar between Abū Bishr Mattā and al-Sīrāfī.[14] A more direct influence on al-Ghazālī, however, might once more be Ibn Sīnā. He suggests *tarāz'* ('scales') as a Persian name for logic in *Dānesh Nāmeh,* stating that, 'The science of logic is the science of the scales' (Gutas 1988:282; cf. Ibn Sīnā 1971:14). He also uses the terms *mi'yār* ('gauge'), *mikyāl* ('measure') and *mīzān* ('balance') in *al-Shifā'* (Gutas 1988:282; cf. Ibn Sīnā 1964:11). Ibn Sīnā experimented with a range of terms to replace the usual *manṭiq* so as to weaken the association between logic in general and Greek logic. He did this in order to commend his own logic, which he regarded as a development from that of the Greeks (Gutas 1988:284).[15] Al-Ghazālī likewise wished to weaken the perception of logic as a foreign discipline, in his case to strengthen the case for logic as an instrument in theological study. As Gutas puts it,

> Ghazālī was in this respect Avicenna's collaborator and mouthpiece, through whom Avicenna's logic was advertised and ensconced in Islamic culture through the use of Avicenna's method of presenting logic under a different name.
>
> (Gutas 1988:284)

Qisṭās is then, an extension of al-Ghazālī's programme to present logic to his readers using terminology which is both graphic, to aid understanding, and familiar, to aid acceptance. The second of these tasks, stressing the acceptability of logic in an Islamic milieu, goes back to the most foundational source by locating it in the text of the Qur'an

itself. There is no specific information on the influence of *Qisṭās*, but it is well-known that logic gradually gained a place amongst subjects deemed worthy of study, and that al-Ghazālī's works in general had a central role in this (see Brentjes 2002; el-Rouayheb 2004; Weiss 1992:656–60).

To summarise, in taking on the task of promoting syllogistic logic in Islamic terms, al-Ghazālī was prompted not simply by his personal conviction of the superiority of syllogistic logic to other forms of reasoning. The wider context shaping his writing included the negative attitudes of many Muslim scholars to syllogistic logic, and encouragements from elements in the work of Ibn Sīnā, and perhaps of others, both to adopt and to adapt the presentation of this logic.

The Qur'an and the syllogism in *Qisṭās*

Summary

As already discussed, the central argument of *Qisṭās*, a work of ten chapters, is that the Qur'an incorporates syllogistic logic. To recap, there is no need for a new authoritative teacher, as the *Ta'līmiyya* maintain, since Muhammad holds this position by dint of bringing revelation which incorporates syllogistic logic. Chapter One sets out the basis of the debate with the Ismā'īlī opponent, focussing on how the truth of knowledge is to be assessed. Al-Ghazālī's interlocutor asks him whether he resorts to using analogy *(qiyās)* and independent judgment *(ra'y),* methods which were anathema to Ḥasan-i al-Ṣabbāḥ, since al-Ghazālī does not seem eager to submit himself to an authoritative teacher. Al-Ghazālī denies using these two methods, arguing that instead he assesses knowledge by the balance, quoting the verse, 'Weigh with a just balance' (Q17:35). Explaining that this balance consists of the five rules of measurement revealed in the Qur'an, he states that 'There is no method with regard to knowledge apart from it' (al-Ghazālī 1353:157; tr. 288). The next five chapters are devoted to the exposition of these rules, that is, five different forms of the syllogism, one rule being discussed in each chapter. Chapters Seven to Ten then discuss other related matters.

Chapter Two concerns 'the Greater Balance of Equivalence' *(al-mīzān al-ta'ādul al-akbar),* which is the first figure of the categorical syllogism. A description of this and other types of syllogism will be given below in the discussion of al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic examples of them. The third chapter of *Qisṭās* presents what al-Ghazālī terms 'the Middle Balance of Measurement' *(al-mīzān al-awsaṭ),* or second figure of the categorical syllogism. Chapter Four moves on to 'the Lesser Balance of Measurement' *(al-mīzān al-asghar),* the third figure of the categorical syllogism. The fifth and sixth chapters deal respectively with two conditional syllogisms. Chapter Five presents 'the Balance of Concomitance' *(mīzān al-talāzum)* or connective conditional syllogism, while Chapter Six concerns 'the Balance of Opposition' *(mīzān al-ta'ānud)* or separative conditional syllogism.

Turning from his exposition of syllogisms in the Qur'an to related matters, in Chapter Seven al-Ghazālī discusses false syllogisms. He regards these as being of Satanic origin,

and discusses how the *ahl al-ta'līm* use them. Chapter Eight focuses on Muhammad, al-Ghazālī arguing that he is the only authoritative teacher needed, and stating how his truthfulness is established by means of syllogisms rather than reliance on miracles purporting to demonstrate Muhammad's truthfulness. Chapter Nine concerns the types of controversies which can arise between three groups of people, the elite, the common people and those given to divisive debate. Al-Ghazālī recommends three different types of approach to them, logic, preaching and disputation respectively. Chapter Ten discusses *ra'y* (personal opinion) and *qiyās* (analogy) and their inadequacy as tools of enquiry in comparison with syllogisms. Finally, in a brief conclusion, al-Ghazālī urges his readers to retain the figurative language in which he has clothed his discussion of syllogisms. He contends that this imagery of the balances is important in making the logical method comprehensible and showing its importance.

Having surveyed the context and content of *Qisṭās*, it is now possible to turn to detailed exposition of al-Ghazālī's treatment of the syllogism. Attention is first given to examples of syllogisms which al-Ghazālī argues are embedded in the Qur'anic text. Following this, other verses which al-Ghazālī interprets as general references to syllogistic logic are discussed. Finally, al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical justifications for his approach to the Qur'an in *Qisṭās* are considered.

Al-Ghazālī's examples of syllogisms in the Qur'an

Before concentrating on al-Ghazālī's treatment of the syllogism in *Qisṭās*, a brief account of the syllogism itself is required. This account does not seek to be comprehensive, but rather aims to situate al-Ghazālī's presentation of the syllogism in the context of its strongest influence, the work of Ibn Sīnā. The present chapter will draw on *Ishārāt* as a source of reference, Ibn Sīnā's last work on this subject, and one which, while it differs from his earlier *al-Shifā' (The Cure)* and its summary, *Kitāb al-Najāt (The Book of Salvation)* in some respects, nevertheless defends 'the same syllogistic conclusions from the same premise pairs' (Street 2002:130). *Ishārāt* defines the syllogism as a type of proof in which, 'If its propositions are admitted, then another statement necessarily follows from them' (Ibn Sīnā 1958:I:373; tr.1984:131; cf. Aristotle 1984:I, 1, 24b).

The syllogism contains three propositions, two of which are premises, the third the conclusion.[16] Each proposition comprises two terms, the subject and predicate. The terms have a qualitative relation to each other, that is, they either apply or do not apply to each other. They also have a quantitative relation, that is, they may apply (or not) universally or particularly. The predicate of the conclusion is known as the major term, the subject of the conclusion as the minor term. Al-Ghazālī's examples, discussed here, will illustrate these aspects of the syllogism.

Ibn Sīnā divides syllogisms into two main types in *Ishārāt,* a division reflected in *Qisṭās* (Ibn Sīnā 1958:I:374; tr. 131–2). One type is the categorical or conjunctive *(iqtirānī)* syllogism, in which two categorical propositions together yield a third. For example, 'All A is B; and all B is C; therefore all A is C'. The other type *(istithnā'ī),* has been translated variously as the conditional (the translation used here), hypothetical or repetitive syllogism (Gyekye 1972).[17] In such a syllogism, one premise is conditional, the

other categorical, leading to a categorical conclusion. For example, 'If P then Q; P; therefore Q.' *Qisṭās* presents the three figures of the categorical or *iqtirānī* syllogism as the greater, middle and lesser balances of equivalence. The other two syllogisms which al-Ghazālī discusses, and which would fit Ibn Sīnā's classification as *istithnā'ī,* are the connective conditional, so called because it involves an 'if…then' premise, and the separative conditional, involving an 'either…or' premise.

In *Ishārāt,* Ibn Sīnā distinguishes the three figures of the categorical syllogism according to the role of the middle term (Ibn Sīnā 1958:I:377; tr. 134). In the first figure, the middle term is the subject of the major premise (the premise containing the major term), and the predicate of the minor premise; in the second figure, it is the predicate of both; in the third figure it is the subject of both. These 3 figures can be subdivided into 14 moods, or different sets of propositions, varying according to qualitative and quantitative relations, that is, for example, 'all A is B'; 'no A is B'; 'some A is B'; and 'some A is not B'. Only those syllogistic moods illustrated by al-Ghazālī will be discussed here.[18]

Turning from general discussion of the syllogism to al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic examples, a fundamental question concerns the accuracy of their formulation. In Chapter Two of *Qisṭās* al-Ghazālī discusses the first figure of the categorical syllogism, which he terms the Greater Balance of Equivalence *(mīzān al-akbar min mawāzīn al-ta'ādul)* (al-Ghazālī 1353:160–7; tr. 291–7). For each type of syllogism he discusses he summarises the logical principle behind it, which in this case is that the judgment applying to the more general also applies to the more particular.[19] Al-Ghazālī argues that this type of syllogism is found in Abraham's response to an unbeliever, Nimrod, who claimed attributes akin to that of Abraham's God (Q2:258). Al-Ghazālī converts Abraham's challenge, 'God brings the sun from the east; do you bring it from the west?'[20] into two different syllogisms. The first reads:

> Whoever can make the sun rise is God.
> But my God can make the sun rise.
> [Therefore] my God is God—and not you, Nimrod.

Syllogisms eventually came to be conventionally described by certain sequences of letters. As McCarthy notes in his translation (1980:293) this is an example of the mood DARII, which takes the form, 'all B is A; some C is B; therefore some C is A'.

Al-Ghazālī presents the second syllogism as follows:

> My Lord is the one who makes the sun rise.
> And the one who makes the sun rise is a god.
> So it follows from it that my Lord is a god.[21]

This is an example of the mood BARBARA, which takes the form, 'all A is B; all B is C; therefore all A is C'.

Chapter Three presents al-Ghazālī's discussion of the second figure of the categorical syllogism, which he terms the Middle Balance of Equivalence *(al-mīzān al-awsaṭ)* (al-Ghazālī 1353:167–9; tr. 297–300.). The logical principle of this figure is that if something is affirmed of one thing and denied of another, then those two things must be different (al-Ghazālī 1353:168; tr. 298). Al-Ghazālī uses the mood CESARE of the second figure, which takes the form 'No N is M; all X is M; therefore no X is N'. This is also linked to Abraham, in this case his statement, 'I love not the things which set' (Q6:76). Drawing on the Qur'anic context of the passage, al-Ghazālī converts this to:

The moon is a thing which sets.
But God is not a thing which sets.
Therefore the moon is not a God.

This is one of two occasions where al-Ghazālī seeks to justify his claim of having identified a syllogism in a Qur'anic passage by reminding his reader of the Qur'an's brevity of expression. Here he refers to *ījāz* and *iḍmār* (al-Ghazālī 1353:167; tr. 297) and on another occasion to *ḥadhf* and *ījāz* (al-Ghazālī 1353:162; tr. 293), all three terms denoting ellipsis. The comment is necessary here as the Qur'anic passage does not include the major premise, which is, however, implicit. Hence al-Ghazālī considers that here the Qur'an offers only an enthymeme syllogism, that is, a syllogism in which one premise is implicit and one explicit (see Stebbing 1930:83).

Al-Ghazālī subsequently offers two further examples of the second figure of the categorical syllogism. One is God's statement to Muhammad regarding the Jews' and Christians' claims to be sons of God, 'Say: Why then does he chastise you for your sin? No, you are but mortals, of His creating' (Q5:18). Al-Ghazālī converts this to a syllogism of the mood FESTINO, following the pattern, 'no N is M; some X is M; therefore no X is N':

Sons (of God) are not chastised (by God).
But you are chastised (by God).
Therefore you are not sons (of God).

The second example concerns the Jews' claim to be favoured by God. 'Say: you of Jewry, if you assert that you are the friends of God, apart from other men, then desire death, if you speak truly. But they will never desire it' (Q62:6–7). Al-Ghazālī presents this in the mood CAMESTRES of the second figure of the categorical syllogism, which takes the form, 'All N is M; no X is M; therefore no X is N':

Every friend desires to meet his friend.
But the Jew does not desire to meet God.
Therefore he is not the friend of God.

Al-Ghazālī here treats his chosen Qur'anic passage as an enthymeme syllogism, since the major premise ('every friend desires to meet his friend') is implicit rather than explicitly stated in the text. As McCarthy notes in his translation (1980:299) his syllogism should in fact be re-formulated as follows:

Every friend of God desires to meet his friend God.
But the Jew does not long to meet God.
Therefore the Jew is not a friend of God.

In Chapter Four al-Ghazālī discusses the third figure of the categorical syllogism, which he terms the Lesser Balance of Equivalence *(al-mīzān al-aṣghar)* (al-Ghazālī 1353:169ff.; tr. 300ff.). He defines this figure as follows: if two qualities are both found in one thing, then some aspect, though not all, of one of the two must be qualified by the other (al-Ghazālī 1353:170; tr. 301). The example given is the statement, 'They measured not God with His true measure when they said: God has not sent down aught on any mortal. Say: Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men?' (Q6:91).

Al-Ghazālī converts this into the following syllogism of the mood DARAPTI, in the form, 'all S is P; all S is R; therefore some R is P':

Moses is a man.
Moses is one upon whom the Scripture was sent down.
Some man has had sent down upon him the Book [Scripture].

Al-Ghazālī adds, 'And by this is refuted the general claim that Scripture is not sent down upon any man at all', referring to the challenge of the unbelievers' words in the Qur'an, 'God has not sent down aught on any mortal' (al-Ghazālī 1353:169–70; tr. 300).

As already noted, chapters Five and Six concern conditional *(istithnā'ī)* syllogisms, in which one premise is conditional, the other categorical. Stoic in origin, the introduction of these syllogisms into Arabic logic was effected by Ibn Sīnā (Goodman 1992:196ff.). Chapter Five concerns the connective *(muttaṣila)* conditional syllogism, termed connective since the conditional premise is in the form of 'if…then'. Aristotle termed

such syllogisms 'hypothetical' rather than conditional *(sharṭiyya)* but the latter term is favoured by Ibn Sīnā (see Mates 1961:42–57).

Al-Ghazālī names the connective conditional syllogism the Balance of Concomitance *(al-mīzān al-talāzum)* (al-Ghazālī 1353:171–3; tr. 302–4.). He states that the logical principle of this type of syllogism is that 'everything which is a necessary concomitant *(lāzim)* of a thing follows it in every circumstance' (*Qisṭās:* 174; tr. 303). Once again, it is possible that Ibn Sīnā influences al-Ghazālī's vocabulary, since Ibn Sīnā uses the term *talāzum* to describe mutual implication, that is, the relation of two conditional propositions wherein it is possible immediately to infer one from the other: 'Let us explain the different cases of *al-talāzum*' (Ibn Sīnā 1964:362; tr. 164).

Al-Ghazālī quotes three verses to illustrate the connective conditional syllogism, forming syllogisms from two of them (al-Ghazālī 1353:182; tr. 302). The first reads, 'Why, were there gods in them [earth and heaven] other than God, they would surely go to ruin' (Q21:22). This is converted as follows:

> If the world has two gods, heaven and earth would have gone to ruin.
> But it is a known fact that they have not gone to ruin.
> So there follows from these two a necessary condition, viz. the denial of the
> two gods.

The second verse quoted states, 'If there had been other gods with Him, as they say, in that case assuredly they would have sought a way unto the Lord of the Throne' (Q17:42). Al-Ghazālī presents this as follows:

> If there had been with the Lord of the Throne other gods, they assuredly would have sought a way to the Lord of the Throne.
> But it is a known fact that they did not seek that.
> So there follows necessarily the denial of gods other than the Lord of the Throne.

In both cases, the Qur'anic verses provide only the conditional premise, not the categorical premise or the conclusion. Both of these syllogisms are correct forms of the mode *tollendo tollens,* which has the form, 'if P, then Q; but not P; therefore not Q' (Stebbing 1930:104–5).[22]

Chapter Six concerns the separative conditional syllogism, which *Qisṭās* labels the Balance of Opposition *(mīzān al-ta'ānud).* Al-Ghazālī describes the logical principle of

this syllogism as being that if something is found in two mutually exclusive categories, its existence in one of them must entail its denial in the other (al-Ghazālī 1353:174; tr. 305). Al-Ghazālī quotes the verse, 'Say: 'Who provides for you out of the heavens and the earth?' Say: 'God'. Surely, either we or you are upon right guidance, or in manifest error' (Q34:24). This is presented as follows:

> We or you are in manifest error.
> But it is known that We are not in error.
> So there follows from their coupling a necessary conclusion, viz. that you are in error.

This is an example of the mood *tollendo ponens,* having the form, 'Either P or Q; but not P; therefore Q'(Stebbing 1930:104–5).

From this account of al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic examples of the syllogism,[23] it is evident that the syllogisms he derives are accurate. However, it has also been shown that he sometimes draws on verses containing only one of the premises of the alleged syllogism. In the case of the three figures of the categorical syllogism, al-Ghazālī has also chosen to illustrate the alleged presence of syllogisms in the Qur'an by examples which include the first mood of each of the three figures, BARBARA, CESARE and DARAPTI. This enhances the sense that al-Ghazālī has approached the Qur'an with a prior plan of what he wants to find within it. There can be no doubt, however, that al-Ghazālī has a thorough grasp of his subject, and that a defensible case can be mounted to argue that he does not distort the Qur'anic passages he employs to the extent that they are badly out of shape.

Other qur'anic verses interpreted with reference to the syllogism

In addition to finding Qur'anic verses which in his view exemplify syllogisms, al-Ghazālī also interprets other Qur'anic passages so as to find in them a reference to the syllogism. The most prominent verse, since it is cited either fully or in part on five separate occasions, reads, 'Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and mild exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner' (Q16:125) (al-Ghazālī: 156–7, 188–9, 193, 195, 203; tr. 288, 318–19, 323, 324, 332). Al-Ghazālī uses this verse to explain his belief in the need for different approaches in influencing different groups of people. According to al-Ghazālī, the elite *(al-khawwāṣṣ)* are in view in the phrase, 'argue with them in the best manner' which he interprets as a Qur'anic exhortation to use syllogistic logic. This contrasts with the approach to the common people *(al-a'wāmm),* who need preaching *(al-maw'iẓa),* and the divisive debaters *(ahl al-jadal wa'l-shaghab),* who need disputation *(al-mujādala)* (al-Ghazālī 1353:189; tr. 319). Al-Ghazālī's purpose in quoting Q16:125 is the need to use syllogistic logic to summon the elite (al-Ghazālī 1353:193; tr. 323). He also identifies the elite as those given to disputation but who are capable of a high level of understanding (al-Ghazālī 1353:195; tr. 324). Ibn Rushd (2001:8) later adopted al-Ghazālī's interpretation of Q16:125.

Al-Ghazālī finds another reference to the syllogism in Q7:200, 'Indeed, those who fear God, when a visitation from the Devil afflicts them, will remember, and behold they will see clearly' (al-Ghazālī 1353:185; tr. 314). Al-Ghazālī states regarding the need to 'remember', 'If something causes difficulty for you, you submit it to the balance and "remember" its conditions with serene mind and full diligence, and "then you will see clearly"'. The reference to the balance shows that for al-Ghazālī 'remembering' here involves analysing a problem by means of syllogistic logic. This interpretation is in marked contrast to al-Ghazālī's understanding of the verse's call to 'remember' as a reference to Sufi *dhikr,* found four times in *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb,* Book XXI of *Iḥyā'* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:12, 27, 29, 35; tr. 45, 111, 118, 144). There are a number of understandings of *dhikr* in *Iḥyā'* (Nakamura 1984:88–9), none of which involves syllogisms.

Al-Ghazālī states that the presence of examples of syllogisms in the Qur'an explains why the Qur'an is called 'light':

> And were it not for the Qur'an's containing the balances it would not be correct to call the Qur'an 'light', for light is not seen in itself but by it other things are seen, and this is the quality of the balance.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1353:195; tr. 324)

This is a reference to verses describing the Qur'an as light, such as, 'we sent down to you a clear light' (Q4:174). In *Mishkāt* (al-Ghazālī 1998:12) the same point occurs, illustrated in part by the same verse, that the Qur'an deserves to be called 'light', on account of its capacity to make things other than itself visible. In *Mishkāt,* however, al-Ghazālī does not link the Qur'an's capacity to shed light with its incorporation of syllogisms, even though syllogisms are mentioned elsewhere in *Mishkāt,* as will be discussed in chapter 6.

Returning to *Qisṭās,* al-Ghazālī cites three passages mentioning a balance as references to logic. The first of these, 'Weigh with a just balance' (Q 17:35 and Q26:182) is also, as previously noted, the verse from which al-Ghazālī takes the title of *Qisṭās.*[24] In both occurrences the context of the phrase is that of fair dealing in trade. Another text used is 'The Compassionate has taught the Qur'an. He created man…and the sky He raised and He set up the balance' (Q55:1–2, 7–9). Third, al-Ghazālī quotes, 'We have sent forth Our Messengers with clear proofs, and sent down with them the Book and the balance' (Q57:25). The context of both of these passages leaves the precise meaning of the term 'balance' more open, making it easier for al-Ghazālī to interpret the term in accord with his emphasis on logic.

In all of these interpretations by al-Ghazālī, of Q16:125, Q7:200, verses such as Q4:175, and the three references to the balance, the role of the syllogism is foregrounded. This is no surprise given its central role in *Qisṭās* as a whole, but the charge could be levelled that these interpretations are implausible. Such a charge raises the question of what hermeneutical justification al-Ghazālī offers for an approach to the Qur'an which produces both these interpretations and his Qur'anic examples of syllogisms already described. To this justification we now turn.

The hermeneutical framework of Qisṭās

Al-Ghazālī's comments in *Qisṭās* on his theoretical approach to the text are brief but nonetheless significant. He gives two justifications for his approach, the most important, to be discussed first, being the belief in hidden meanings in Qur'anic verses. In addition, al-Ghazālī makes a claim about the presence of syllogisms in scriptures pre-dating the Qur'an.

Al-Ghazālī argues in *Qisṭās* that the Qur'an contains hidden meanings (*Qisṭās*: 177–8; tr. 308). The same assumption that the outer or material contains the more important spiritual reality is also evident when al-Ghazālī discusses the spiritual nature of the Qur'an's balance (al-Ghazālī 1353:161; tr. 292). This view that the Qur'an contains hidden meanings was previously discussed in relation to the four texts analysed in Chapter 3, all works reflecting greater Sufi influence than *Qisṭās*. Al-Ghazālī also makes the comparison (al-Ghazālī 1353:177; tr. 308) between true understanding of the Qur'an and the interpretation of dreams *(ta'bīr)* that was discussed in Chapter 3. He then adds an example of dream interpretation which he attributes to the prominent dream interpreter Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728).[25] He also claims that he has removed any covering between the individual and the true meaning of the text, stating his claim in the words of the Qur'an, 'We lifted your cover from you and your vision today is keen' (Q50:22). Finally he adds that confirmation of his arguments on this theme can be found in the chapter on the reality of death in *Jawāhir*. This would seem to be a mistaken reference, either by al-Ghazālī or a scribe, since there is no such chapter in *Jawāhir,* but rather in *Kitāb Dhikr al-Mawt,* Book XL of *Iḥyā'*. A possible affirmation of his arguments might occur here (al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:484ff.) where al-Ghazālī presents three degrees of belief in the events surrounding death. This might mirror his references in *Qisṭās* to the three classes of people to be addressed in three different ways, but this must remain speculation.

The clear implication of al-Ghazālī's discussion of his hermeneutical framework is that there exist hidden meanings to Qur'anic texts. Al-Ghazālī therefore offers to unlock these meanings for his readers, either by revealing them directly, or by teaching the correct method for understanding the Qur'an, and thereby enabling his readers to discover them for themselves. The theme of hidden meanings is a familiar one in al-Ghazālī's Sufi-orientated writings, but its presence is more surprising in *Qisṭās*, a work concerned primarily with syllogistic logic and generally lacking in Sufi emphasis (for a possible exception, see later). However, it should come as no surprise to find al-Ghazālī weaving different strands of his thinking into his works in varying combinations. For example, the same specific examples of dream interpretation found in *Qisṭās* are also found in *Fayṣal*, which, as outlined in Chapter 1, does not argue for belief in hidden meanings within every verse. Instead, the examples of dream interpretation in *Fayṣal* are used to argue for the possibility of figurative meanings of the Qur'anic text which can be adopted if there is decisive proof *(burhān)* that the apparent meaning *(ẓāhir)* is impossible. So a comparison of *Fayṣal* and *Qisṭās* reveals that al-Ghazālī uses the same illustration in support of two different hermeneutical frameworks.

Similarly, a shared hermeneutical framework found in two texts by al-Ghazālī does not necessarily indicate that he will take the same stance on an issue of interpretation in those two texts. As noted in Chapter 3, in *Kitāb Ādāb tilāwat al-Qur'ān* he argues in favour of the exercise of personal opinion *(ra'y)* in interpretation, an argument evidently aimed at justifying his support for hidden meanings. However, in *Qisṭās*, the exercise of *ra'y* is condemned despite the presentation of the same hermeneutical framework (al-Ghazālī 1353:197–8; tr. 326–7). This is because al-Ghazālī does not wish to leave himself vulnerable to Ismā'īlī criticisms that those who do not follow the teaching of an infallible teacher simply resort to *ra'y*. Evidently al-Ghazālī's varied treatment of the topic of *ra'y* is an example of his choosing arguments to suit his purpose. Can one go further than this and accuse al-Ghazālī of contradicting himself in his different texts? Technically the answer must be yes, but it is so clear that he is arguing a particular case to each audience, rather than constructing an overarching theory, that the charge, while correct, somehow seems to miss the thrust of what al-Ghazālī the debater and energetic opponent seeks to achieve.

Al-Ghazālī's tendency is thus to maintain no rigid boundary lines between Sufi and non-Sufi areas of his hermeneutical thought. The *ad hoc* nature of his use of the concept of hidden meaning is clearly evident in that although the hermeneutical framework presented in *Qisṭās* and al-Ghazālī's more Sufi texts is the same, the nature of the hidden meaning explored in *Qisṭās* is clearly quite different. In *Qisṭās* it consists of syllogistic reformulations of verses and the Qur'an's consequent affirmation of syllogistic logic as the path to knowledge of the truth. As an understanding of *ta'wīl* leading to the uncovering of hidden meanings this is novel. The meanings which al-Ghazālī uncovers are not metaphorical, nor are they hidden in the usual sense intended by al-Ghazālī, as, for example, in *Jawāhir,* where an apparently fleeting or indirect reference to a subject is extrapolated into a basis for al-Ghazālī's own theological ideas. Instead, the hidden meanings in *Qisṭās* simply require knowledge of how to deduce syllogisms from given statements.

In accord with his view in *Qisṭās* that syllogisms make up the Qur'an's hidden meanings (or perhaps part of them? he is not explicit on this) al-Ghazālī also describes the use of syllogisms as a form of spiritual ascent *(al-mi'rāj al-rūḥānī)*. The role of reason in the spiritual ascent can be seen in an example, al-Ghazālī argues as follows: we can know by observation that the universe is marvellous and well-ordered, indicating that its maker is knowing. If he is knowing he is also living, and if living and knowing, then he subsists in himself. Al-Ghazālī then states:

> Thus, then, we ascend from the quality of the composition of man to the attribute of his Maker, viz. knowledge; then we ascend from knowledge to life, then from it to the essence. This is the spiritual ascension *(al-mi'rāj al-rūḥānī),* and these balances are the steps of the ascension to heaven, or rather to the Creator of heaven, and these balances are the steps of the stairs.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1353:172–3; tr. 303, adapted)[26]

So using the balances—syllogistic reasoning—is the path to greater closeness to God, since they guarantee correct knowledge if properly understood. Given this high view of the syllogism, it is not surprising that in writing *Qisṭās* al-Ghazālī is concerned to emphasise its Qur'anic credentials, since without these credentials, he could be taken to believe that spiritual ascent to God is available by means of a method with no explicit or implicit foundation within the Qur'an.

Yet how far in the ascent to God can syllogisms take us? Kleinknecht concludes that, according to *Qisṭās*, using such reasoning therefore enables the individual to attain 'knowledge of God in the sense of al-Ghazālī's Sufi-soaked piety' (Kleinknecht 1972:180). This statement requires examination, since it leads to the heart of the complex debate over the relationship in al-Ghazālī's thought between the rational and experiential as sources of supreme knowledge. This debate is explored more broadly in the next chapter, which discusses *Mishkāt,* so remarks here will be restricted to *Qisṭās*. Several factors influence the issue of whether *Qisṭās* presents knowledge of God as *fully* attainable through the use of logic alone.

In support of Kleinknecht's view, al-Ghazālī argues that people think syllogistically all the time, albeit without realising. 'For every cognition which is not primary necessarily comes to be in its possessor through the existence of these balances in his soul, even though he is not conscious of it' (*Qisṭās*: 184; tr. 314). This is not dissimilar to Ibn Ḥazm's view that an understanding of logic is inherent in any intelligent person (Ibn Ḥazm 1959:3). However al-Ghazālī's making syllogistic reasoning the path to the fullest knowledge of God seems unlikely given his stance in *Munqidh*. Here, having discussed logic amongst other fields of study, he writes:

> I knew with certainty that the Sufis were masters of states, not purveyors of words, and that I had learned all I could by way of theory. There remained then, only what was attainable, not by *hearing and study,* but by fruitional experience *(dhawq)* (emphasis added). (al-Ghazālī 1959:35; tr. 90)

Perhaps one way out of this apparent contradiction is to regard logic as the attendant who leads us the door of the king's throne room. Logic yields a form of certain knowledge, which helps us to receive what can only ultimately be received by experience. This epistemological issue will be considered further in discussing *Mishkāt,* the subject of Chapter 6. The evidence *Qisṭās* itself suggests that there is no higher way to God than logic, but *Mishkāt* helps to place such an apparently clear-cut statement in a more nuanced context.

Al-Ghazālī's second hermeneutical justification for his argument in favour of syllogistic logic is the relevance of previous scriptures. Here he aims to counteract the impression that in *Qisṭās* he is using the Qur'an in an unprecedented way. When asked if he is the first to invent the names of the balances (syllogisms) and to derive them from the Qur'an, al-Ghazālī replies that although the Qur'anic basis is his new contribution, 'Among some of the past nations, prior to the mission of Muhammad and Jesus they [the

balances] had other names which they had learned from books (*suḥūf*) of Abraham and Moses' (al-Ghazālī 1353:175; tr. 306). So, with an indirect reference to Q87:19 and its mention of 'the *suḥūf* of Abraham and Moses' al-Ghazālī anchors syllogisms in previous scriptures. Such a claim seeks to avoid the criticism that if syllogisms are the supreme path to truth, then truth was not fully accessible before the exposition of syllogisms by Aristotle. Ibn Taymiyya makes this point as one of three criticisms of al-Ghazālī's view in *Qisṭās* that the Qur'anic references to the balance are references to syllogistic logic (Ibn Taymiyya 1368:373–4).[27] Ibn Taymiyya objects that the balance, whatever it might be, was revealed to Noah, Moses and other prophets before the Greeks expounded logic, and that therefore the term 'balance' could not be a reference to syllogistic logic on chronological grounds. In criticising *Qisṭās* in this way Ibn Taymiyya either overlooks or chooses to ignore the fact that al-Ghazālī's claim, that syllogistic logic was revealed in scriptures which predated the Greek tradition, sidesteps just such a criticism. Al-Ghazālī implicitly claims that the Greek tradition only formalised what already existed, and was not an entirely new development. Ibn Taymiyya thus fails to engage with the full extent of al-Ghazālī's defence of his position.

In summary, al-Ghazālī is clearly aware of the need to justify his use of the Qur'an in *Qisṭās*. He does so by reference to hidden meanings and to previous scriptures. It is difficult to gauge the influence of *Qisṭās* specifically (and hence, perhaps, the persuasive power of these arguments) as opposed to al-Ghazālī's logical works as a whole. More than in his other works, however, al-Ghazālī engages in what could be termed apologetic hermeneutics, clearly feeling the need to justify the unusual steps taken in *Qisṭās*. This is not surprising since he was attempting to break new ground.

Conclusion

Four questions were raised at the outset of this chapter, and responses to them can now be drawn together. Regarding the first question, the motivation for writing *Qisṭās*, this is not as puzzling as Watt suggests. Al-Ghazālī sought to render more acceptable a discipline frequently regarded with suspicion on account of its perceived foreign and non-Islamic origins. In so doing he follows the lead of Ibn Sīnā, a frequent influence on him. Furthermore, *Qisṭās* also expands on al-Ghazālī's remarks in *Jawāhir* on the way in which the Qur'an encompasses all knowledge. Second, regarding al-Ghazālī's interpretations, he is generally able to produce accurate syllogisms from his chosen verses, although part of the syllogism he formulates is sometimes only implicit in the Qur'anic verse. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that al-Ghazālī stretches the significance of his chosen texts, finding in them support for ideas he has drawn from Ibn Sīnā. Having said that, al-Ghazālī presents two arguments which might serve to defend his sincerity in *Qisṭās*. First, by maintaining that syllogistic logic is present, though unrecognised, everywhere in human thought processes, al-Ghazālī enhances his claims that it is present in the Qur'an, since he could argue that he is not searching for something rare, but for a phenomenon usually overlooked. Furthermore, if the concept of

hidden meanings in Qur'anic texts is extended sufficiently broadly to include syllogistic logic then al-Ghazālī may have genuinely felt that this included his more surprising uses of the Qur'an. Al-Ghazālī's interpretation of Q7:200 in *Qisṭās*, interpreting the need to 'remember' as being a reference to the syllogism, contrasts with his use of the verse in *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-qalb* to support the Sufi practice of *dhikr*. Yet it seems plausible that al-Ghazālī felt that the concept of hidden meaning genuinely extended to cover two contrasting interpretations. Indeed, it is difficult to argue for any hermeneutical controls on an interpreter who insists on hidden meanings. On what agreed basis can any interpretation be ruled out?

Third, regarding both the nature of the hermeneutical framework in *Qisṭās* and its use, there is a marked similarity to *Jawāhir*. In both works al-Ghazālī presents a Sufi hermeneutical framework to justify his claim for hidden meanings in the Qur'an, while both texts in fact interpret the Qur'an in ways unrelated to Sufism. Instead, both works are shaped by ideas which al-Ghazālī wishes to underpin with Qur'anic texts—in Jawāhir, a range of theological interests, in *Qisṭās*, a narrower focus on epistemology.

The fourth question concerns al-Ghazālī's understanding of how the Qur'an provides certain knowledge. On this point *Qisṭās* is characterised by shifts between apparently Sufi thinking and other ideas seemingly unrelated to Sufism. Belief in hidden meanings in the Qur'an and the possibility of spiritual ascent are notions placed alongside the promotion of syllogistic logic. Such shifts are found not only in *Qisṭās*, but also in other works by al-Ghazālī, as already noted. In particular, the question of whether al-Ghazālī believed that reason or direct, mystical experience of God provides the path to the highest knowledge of God continues to exercise scholars, as will be made evident in Chapter 6. The important point to note in closing is that al-Ghazālī's longstanding commitment both to the Qur'an and to logic confronted him with the challenge of integrating these two sources of knowledge so as to avoid presenting them as rival paths to truth. *Qisṭās*, rather than being trivial or a mere curiosity, is the response to this challenge.

Al-Ghazālī's concern to use the Qur'an in the service of the syllogism in *Qisṭās* highlights both his pre-occupation with epistemology, and also the influence of Ibn Sīnā upon his work. In Chapter 6 both of these elements are once more in evidence, though manifested in a quite different form in *Mishkāt al-anwār*.

6
The coherence of the philosopher
Mishkāt al-anwār

Introduction

This chapter examines al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic interpretations in *Mishkāt al-anwār*. These interpretations accompany his hermeneutical theories in the same work, already discussed in Chapter 3. The focus here is on his treatment of the so-called 'Light Verse', Q24:35, quoted again here for ease of reference:

> Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His Light is like a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, the glass is like a glittering star. It is kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor the West. Its oil would almost shine, even if no fire has touched it. Light upon Light, Allah guides to his Light whomever He pleases and gives the examples to mankind. Allah has knowledge of everything.

This passage has been a frequent focus of attention for Sufi interpreters in particular (see Böwering 2001:132–44). The aim of the present chapter is to explore al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the symbolism of this verse with a particular question in view. What are the implications of the fact that this interpretation is clearly influenced by Ibn Sīnā's interpretation of the same verse, which expounds in symbolic form his doctrine of the intellect? The theme of Ibn Sīnā's influence has recurred frequently throughout the present study, but is most clearly in view in al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the Light Verse in *Mishkāt*. The source, extent and implications of this influence form the basis of the ensuing discussion. After an exposition of Ibn Sīnā's interpretation of the Light Verse, a detailed comparison is made with al-Ghazālī's treatment of the same verse. In addition, attention is given to other, briefer Qur'anic interpretations in *Mishkāt*. In the course of this discussion, the evidence for the influence of Ibn Sīnā is presented more comprehensively than has previously been attempted.

Herbert Davidson and Binyamin Abrahamov, apparently independently, have recently argued that al-Ghazālī's interpretation of this verse is profoundly influenced by similar interpretation in the work of Ibn Sīnā (Davidson 1992:127–53; Abrahamov 1993: 141–68). They infer from this that al-Ghazālī's alleged Sufism was in fact a theory of rational cognition merely decorated with Sufi terminology. They assume that if al-Ghazālī borrowed many of his core ideas from Ibn Sīnā he cannot have intended to impart a Sufi message, even if a superficial reading of *Mishkāt* might suggest otherwise. The present chapter will test this assumption, exploring issues of borrowing and

influence, and also address the question of what al-Ghazālī understands by his use of the term *dhawq* ('experience', or literally 'tasting') in a number of texts.

Davidson concurs with the attitude towards *Mishkāt* expressed by Ibn Rushd, who wrote of al-Ghazālī, 'It appears from the books ascribed to him that in metaphysics he recurs to the philosophers. And of all his books this is most clearly shown and most truly proved in his book called *The Niche for Lights*' (Ibn Rushd 1930:117; tr. I:69; cf. Davidson 1992:130). Davidson examines al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the Light Verse as part of his wider concern with the overall metaphysical framework presented in *Mishkāt*. Abrahamov's exploration ranges across the al-Ghazālī corpus but draws substantially on *Mishkāt,* concluding that al-Ghazālī's supreme way to know God, 'is a philosophical system which sometimes appears in Ṣufic disguise' (Abrahamov 1993:167; see also Abrahamov 1991:1–17).

As will be seen in the following pages, Davidson and Abrahamov are correct to state that al-Ghazālī borrows important elements of his interpretation of the Light Verse from Ibn Sīnā. However, two questions arise from such a finding. First, to what extent is al-Ghazālī's borrowing creative, adapting rather than simply appropriating another's ideas? Second, what are the implications of any such borrowing?

The subject of this chapter forces to the fore the question of how the term 'Sufism' is to be understood. In what follows the term is used interchangeably with 'mysticism'. Attempts to determine exactly what is denoted either by Sufism or mysticism are frequent, but less than complete clarity of definition need not prevent meaningful discussion of the phenomenon. As Brainard notes, 'Few people…could give definitions of "is" or "reason" or "virtue" or "truth" or "beauty" that match the sophistication of our habitual use of these words in conversation' (Brainard 1996:367). Yet we do not abandon the use of such terms. Brainard's own attempt at a definition of mystical experience is based on two core concepts. One is profound content, that is, content concerned with ultimate questions. The second core concept is non-ordinary experience, or experience inexplicable in purely naturalistic terms (Brainard 1996:371–9).[1] However, this definition raises the question of whether mystical experience is simply a synonym for spiritual experience. The latter could also include, for example, joy, or a sense of being guided to take particular action. Yet mysticism historically has been understood more specifically than this, emphasising immediate experience or apprehension of God, a union with (though not necessarily absorption into) God, often accompanied by a radical surrender of self and indifference to the external world, and a stress on experience being beyond words.[2] These considerations, then, will provide a broad theoretical framework in the remainder of the chapter.

Ibn Sīnā on the Light Verse

Basic assumptions concerning Ibn Sīnā's symbolic method

A number of factors have led some to conclude that Ibn Sīnā had a secret doctrine (see, for example, Hourani 1966:42). These include his references to 'Easterners' and 'Eastern Philosophy', his use of extended allegories and his symbolic Qur'anic interpretations. However, the following discussion assumes, with Gutas, that Ibn Sīnā did

not develop and conceal an esoteric ‘Eastern Philosophy’ which was either a departure from, or in opposition to, his other recorded views (Gutas 2000:159–80; see also Gutas 1988:115–30). Gutas argues that there are two important differences between Ibn Sīnā’s ‘Eastern’ and other philosophy. One is that the ‘Eastern’ philosophy is distinguished by being a systematic discussion rather than a historical treatment surveying the views of past authorities. Second, related to this, the ‘Eastern’ philosophy deals with issues Ibn Sīnā considers important, rather than all issues which have arisen in previous discussion (Gutas 2000:159). So the term denotes for Ibn Sīnā the fundamentals of his philosophy as opposed to topics studied simply because they were part of the historical tradition of philosophical enquiry. *Mashriq* (‘Eastern’) refers to Ibn Sīnā’s background in Khurasan, and is intended to contrast with the ‘Western’ school of Iraq (Gutas 1988:127).[3]

Ibn Sīnā had a specific purpose in sometimes using a symbolic mode of expression (see Gutas 1988:297–307, in contrast to the view of Corbin 1960:28–31). According to Ibn Sīnā, demonstrative language, or arguments based on rigorous philosophical distinctions, cannot be understood by the majority. Important concepts must therefore be conveyed in simplified, symbolic form, while concealing the fact that this re-formulation has occurred. The symbolic method is therefore nothing more than a necessary but inferior way of impressing truths upon the minds of those who could not otherwise comprehend them (Gutas 1988:301). While it can be argued that figurative language possesses an imaginative force lost in ‘translating’ it into other terms, the consistency of thought between Ibn Sīnā’s demonstrative and allegorical writings is nevertheless important to stress. The effect of this multi-layered approach, in Ibn Sīnā’s view, is that the majority are enabled to understand, while those of greater philosophical ability are prompted to further exploration, this time using the demonstrative method. As illustrated in Table 6.1, Ibn Sīnā intends precise one-to-one correspondences between symbols and philosophical concepts wherever he composes an allegory or interprets a symbolic text.

Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of the intellect and the interpretation of the Light Verse

If al-Ghazālī borrows much of his interpretation of the Light Verse from Ibn Sīnā, which works did he use? Ibn Sīnā explores the Light Verse most fully in a short work entitled *Fī Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt* (Ibn Sīnā 1968). The authorship of this treatise is sometimes questioned (Davidson 1992:87), but Marmura’s introduction to his Arabic edition argues for its authenticity on the basis of content, terminology and style (Ibn Sīnā 1968:viii). A slightly shorter but better known treatment of the Light Verse along similar lines can be found in *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa’l-tanbīhāt,* a late work dating from 421–5/1030–4 (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:388–94). A translation of this passage is given by Gutas (1988:164–5) (and for discussion of the date of this work see Gutas 1988:140). In what follows both *Ithbāt* and *Ishārāt* are utilised in setting out Ibn Sīnā’s interpretation of the verse. This will help to identify which text had the greater influence on *Mishkāt* when the interpretations of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā are subsequently compared.

Table 6.1 A comparison of Ibn Sīnā's interpretations of Q24:35

Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt		*Fī ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*
aql hayūlānī (material intellect) *al-nāṭiqa*	**Niche**	*al-'aql al-hayūlānī* and *al-nafs*
aql bi'l-fi'l (actual intellect)	**Lamp**	*al-'aql al-mustafād bi'l-fi'l* acquired actualised intellect
'aql bi'l-malaka (intellect in *habitu*)	**In a glass**	that which mediates between the two faculties of Niche and Lamp
fikra (reflection)	**Olive tree**	*al-quwwa al-fikriyya*
ḥads (intuition)	**Oil**	*al-quwwa al-fikriyya*
	Neither from East nor West	cogitative power is neither purely rational nor purely animal
al-'aql al-fi'āl (active intellect)	**Fire**	*al-'aql al-kullī* (universal intellect)
'aql mustafād (acquired intellect)	**Light upon light**	—

In Table 6.1 the elements are listed in the order in which they occur in the Qur'an with one exception. 'Oil' is placed earlier in the table than the phrase 'neither from East nor West' so as to enable the first five parts of the table to list the five faculties of the human intellect in the order in which Ibn Sīnā conceives their status, beginning with the most basic, material intellect, and moving through to the highest, intuition. These are followed by three other elements of the Light Verse. Where a phrase rather than a particular term is given, this is a summary of Ibn Sīnā's remarks.

As already noted, Ibn Sīnā uses the Light Verse to expound his doctrine of the intellect. The epistemological scheme linked to this verse, and outlined in different ways in other texts, is central to Ibn Sīnā's concerns, 'the *via regia* to his philosophical system' (Gutas 1988:172). Ibn Sīnā offers a Qur'anic presentation of ideas frequently found expressed in non-Qur'anic terms elsewhere in his writings in order to enhance the acceptability of his ideas to other Muslims (Gutas 1988:172). Underpinning Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of the intellect was his understanding of the Active Intellect, discussed in Chapter 3. He believed this to be an incorporeal being emanating from God which enables the human intellect's potential for thought to be realised (Davidson 1992:4). Plotinus had first posed the question of how a multi-faceted universe can derive from a unitary source, his answer being to posit a series of emanations. In Ibn Sīnā's scheme, the Active Intellect is the tenth such emanated incorporeal intelligence, there being nine others above it in the celestial hierarchy.[4] For Ibn Sīnā the Active Intellect is also the figure intended by the Qur'an's depiction of an angel of revelation, and is the source of the human soul and abstract thought.

The role of the human intellect in relation to the Active Intellect resembles that of a mirror. A thought is reflected in the human intellect if it faces the Active Intellect (Davidson 1992:94).[5] This reflection occurs by the human intellect's conjunction (*ittiṣāl*)[6] with the Active Intellect, a phenomenon not to be confused with union between the two intellects resulting in the absorption of the individual.[7] Whether Ibn Sīnā can be taken to understand *ittiṣāl* as a Sufi phenomenon is a question addressed after the other terms in Table 6.1 have been explained.[8]

'Material intellect' denotes the basic human potential for thought, as yet completely unactualised. 'Actual intellect' refers to having acquired a full range of concepts and propositions. Despite the implication of the term, this is an advanced stage of potentiality. 'Intellect *in habitu*'[9] describes the stage of having learned the first principles of thought although not actually thinking them at a given moment. Acquiring the potentiality signified by 'intellect *in habitu*' is necessary in order to move on to actual intellect. These stages are achieved by conjunction with the Active Intellect (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:392; tr. Gutas 1988:165).

The fourth, cogitative faculty combines propositions to produce conclusions, as in syllogistic logic, but achieves this in two different ways. One is reflection *(fikra),* the other intuition (*ḥads*). Ibn Sīnā describes these in a passage central to the remainder of our discussion in the present chapter.

> Perhaps you now wish to find out about the difference between 'reflection' *(fikra)* and 'Intuition' (*ḥads*). Listen: Reflection is a certain motion of the soul among concepts, having for the most part recourse to imagination. *It looks for the middle term* (or, in case it cannot be located, [it looks for] anything analogous to it which might lead to a knowledge of the unknown), by surveying the stock [of ideas] (or whatever is analogous to it) stored inside. Sometimes it reaches what is sought and sometimes it falls short. Intuition occurs *when the middle term presents itself to the mind all at once,* either as a result of a search or desire [for it] but without any [corresponding] motion [of the soul], or without any desire and motion. The term is a means to something; that, or something like it, presents itself [to the mind] along with the middle term (emphasis added).
>
> (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:392–4; tr. Gutas 1988:165)

According to *Ishārāt,* as quoted in Chapter 5, above, the syllogism is 'A discourse composed of statements. If the propositions which the syllogism involves are admitted, this by itself necessarily leads to another statement' (Ibn Sīnā 1958: I:370; tr. 130).[10]

Ibn Sīnā explains the middle term (*al-ḥadd al-awsaṭ*) as follows: 'Every C is B; every B is A; from this it follows that every C is A', where B is the middle term (Ibn Sīnā: I:373, 377; tr. 130, 133). The middle term must be sought since it does not appear in the conclusion, and yet is vital both to understanding that conclusion and assessing its validity. Reflection *(fikra)* involves the usual intellectual processes of syllogistic reasoning, that is, proceeding from two premises to a conclusion, as discussed in Chapter 5. By contrast intuition (*ḥads*) is Ibn Sīnā's term for the more spontaneous

acquisition of the same insight, likewise resulting in perceiving the middle term of the syllogism. *Ḥads* is the medieval Arabic translation of Aristotle's term *eustochia* (Davidson 1992:99), the capacity for 'hitting correctly upon the mark' (Gutas 1988:166–7).[11]

The concept of *ḥads* is integral to Ibn Sīnā's understanding of prophecy, since a very highly developed capacity for intuition is what marks out a prophet. In *Ishārāt* this is not made explicit, but immediately following the explanation of *fikra* and *ḥads* Ibn Sīnā argues that logically there must be persons of the lowest and highest possible degree of *ḥads* (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:394–5). The same point is made in *Ithbāt* (Ibn Sīnā 1968:46; tr. 115). It is likely that he had himself in mind in his description of those most highly gifted in this way, and elsewhere he also links this capacity to prophecy. Note also that Ibn Sīnā sometimes uses different terminology instead of *ḥads*, terminology later to find resonances in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt,* as will become evident. *Ḥāl al-nafs al-insāniyya (The State of the Human Soul), al-Shifā' (The Cure)* and *Kitāb al-Najāt (The Book of Salvation)* state of intuition that 'This is a kind of prophethood—indeed its highest faculty—and the most appropriate thing is to call this "sacred faculty" *(quwwa qudsīyya)*' (Gutas 1988:163, who gives references for each text). Similarly in *Mubāḥathat* Ibn Sīnā refers to 'the sacred faculty of the soul' *(quwwat al-nafs al-qudsiyya)* (Ibn Sīnā 1947:231; tr. Gutas 1988:165).

The use of these terms raises the important question of whether Ibn Sīnā envisages a Sufi phenomenon when discussing *ḥads*. It has often been assumed that there is a Sufi component to Ibn Sīnā's thought, especially in the light of the ninth section of *Ishārāt,* which describes the progress of the *'ārif* (see Morewedge 1971–1972, and Davidson 1992:105, where he cites Goichon, Gardet and Corbin as assuming such a Sufi component). In particular, after describing the gradual progress of the *'ārif* in the ability to be united with the truth through knowledge, Ibn Sīnā writes of the final step:

> Following this, he abandons himself. Thus, he notices the side of sanctity only. If he notices his self he does so inasmuch as it notices the Truth, and not inasmuch as it is ornamented with the pleasure of having the Truth. At this point, the arrival *(al-wuṣūl)* is real.
>
> (Ibn Sina 1958:IV:92–3; tr. 88)

Shortly after this Ibn Sīnā adds this:

> He who finds knowledge…plunges into the ocean of the arrival. Here there are steps not fewer in number than those that have preceded. We have preferred brevity concerning them, for conversation does not capture them, a phrase does not explicate them, and discourse does not reveal anything about them. No power responsive to language other than the imagination receives even a semblance of them.
>
> (Ibn Sīnā 1958:IV:99; 88–9, adapted)

Note the emphasis in the first of these passages on encounter with the Divine which displaces awareness of the self,[12] and in the second on experience which is beyond words. These passages raise the question of whether the journey of the *'ārif* is simply another way of describing a highly developed capacity for *ḥads*, or whether it corresponds to the broad definition of mysticism given earlier. To put the matter another way, does such a journey contradict Ibn Sīnā's reliance on syllogisms, or move beyond it but without contradiction? Davidson (1992:105) regards the *'ārif* described here as simply a 'knower, man of knowledge'. In similar vein both Gutas and Heath reject the idea of any mystical component to Ibn Sīnā's thinking (Gutas 2000:163–4; cf. Gutas 1988:259; Heath 1994:99). However, a question arises as to why Ibn Sīnā should both use the language of Sufism, such as 'arrival' *(al-wuṣūl)* and also seem to echo Sufi claims to experience dimensions of existence beyond verbal expression which displace awareness of the self.[13]

It seems wise to avoid too hasty a dismissal of Ibn Sīnā's thought as without Sufi content, or at least Sufi overtones. Goodman advocates 'an irenic stance', seeking to reconcile the perceived opposition of rationalism and mysticism in Ibn Sīnā's thought (Goodman 1992:124).[14] While the end, the discernment of the middle term, would appear to emphasise the rational, the *means,* for Ibn Sīnā, is clearly some kind of direct contact with a higher power. Of course, it can be misleading to oppose completely the rational and experiential. Our theories can help to determine our approach to experience and our understanding of it, so there must be some acknowledgement that there might be an area of overlap which mingles the two. It can be argued that for Ibn Sīnā, philosophy and a certain type of mysticism were not mutually exclusive epistemological options but finally combined in his scheme. However, such a conclusion is not essential to the argument that al-Ghazālī, in borrowing from Ibn Sīnā, is not confined to a reliance on the intellect, even if Ibn Sīnā is interpreted in this way.

What is in fact essential for the purposes of this enquiry into al-Ghazālī's borrowings is to distinguish four possible positions. First, Ibn Sīnā genuinely incorporated some form of Sufism, albeit a distinctive form, based on his philosophy. The issue of al-Ghazālī's borrowing from him then ceases to be problematic for al-Ghazālī's own Sufi stance. Second, al-Ghazālī might consider Ibn Sīnā's writing to embody some form of Sufism, even though Ibn Sīnā did not intend it to, and al-Ghazālī incorporated what he took to be Sufi elements into his own work, innocent of the misleading impression this might give in subsequent years. Third, al-Ghazālī recognised that Ibn Sīnā's thought was not Sufi in any sense, but borrowed and adapted it so that it could usefully be employed in his own, different metaphysical framework. A fourth position, that al-Ghazālī knew that there was no Sufi component in Ibn Sīnā's thought, did not add to it, and that his borrowing from this source therefore reveals that he had no genuine Sufi elements to his own thought, is the view which is disputed in the present account. In seeking to resolve these questions, we now turn to al-Ghazālī's own exposition of the Light Verse, and his borrowing from Ibn Sīnā.

Al-Ghazālī on the Light Verse

Al-Ghazālī's close engagement with Ibn Sīnā's writings over many years is a complex phenomenon which cannot be surveyed fully here, though some elements of this

engagement have been noted in the course of the present study (see Janssens 1986 and 1993, in addition to works already noted). Passages reflecting this influence in relation to the Light Verse occur in a number of al-Ghazālī's works and provide a context for the discussion in *Mishkāt*. In the following quotations the translation of the relevant parts of the Light Verse have been replaced by Fakhry's translation on each occasion, so as to maintain consistency with the quotation of the Light Verse given at the outset of this chapter.

In *Tahāfut* al-Ghazālī shows his awareness of Ibn Sīnā's link between the faculties of the soul and the Light Verse. After recounting Ibn Sīnā's standard argument that an exceptional capacity for *ḥads* is what distinguishes a prophet al-Ghazālī adds that such a prophet is described by the words 'Its oil will almost shine, even if no fire has touched it. Light upon light' (al-Ghazālī 1997:167). Here, however, al-Ghazālī subtly changes the heart of Ibn Sīnā's idea by writing that the rational speculative faculty *(al-quwwa al-'aqliyya al-naẓariyya)* reduces to *ḥads*, or speed in passing from one thing to another. In other words, al-Ghazālī collapses *fikra* and *ḥads* into one another completely. This is 'explicitly reductive' but perhaps attributable to the context of the author's polemic in *Tahāfut* against Ibn Sīnā's intellectualism attributable (Goodman 1992:181).

Second, in *Iḥyā'* Book I, *Kitāb al-'Ilm,* al-Ghazālī describes the disparity in people's intellects. After mentioning those who are slow to learn, and people with brilliant minds, al-Ghazālī writes of prophets as follows:

> The perfect from whose souls truth emanates without any previous instruction. Thus God said, 'Its oil will almost shine, even if no fire has touched it. Light upon light'. Such are the prophets to whom recondite things are clarified in their inward thoughts without having learnt or heard anything of the sort. This is expressed by the word inspiration *(ilhām)*… This kind of imparting information by the angels to the prophets is different from explicit revelation *(waḥy)* which involves hearing a definite voice with the ear and seeing the angel with the eye.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:82; tr. 234–5, adapted)

Third, in Book XXXV of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul,* al-Ghazālī offers an extended allegory of the traveller *(al-sālik)* who goes in search of knowledge, here personified. 'Knowledge' tells the traveller of the need to have spiritual insight so as to see beyond the outer form of things. The traveller's reaction is anger at his own lack of such insight:

> But there was his oil in the niche of his heart, which will almost shine, even if no fire has touched it, so that what knowledge had presented to him, coupled with his own anger, ignited his oil so that it reached a point where it was light upon light.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:217; tr. 27)

A variant of these interpretations occurs in *Fayṣal.* Here al-Ghazālī states that the true meaning of unbelief and faith, and of truth and error, are only disclosed to hearts which have been purified, refined, enlightened by *dhikr,* nourished by right thinking and adorned by adherence to the Law to such a degree that, in the final stage these hearts are

> Drenched in the light that arcs from the niche of prophethood, at which time their hearts become as if they were immaculate mirrors, the oil-lamp of faith that rests in the enclosed glass around them becoming a source of light, its oil virtually glowing though fire touches it not.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1961:129; tr. 87)

There is, then, ample evidence of al-Ghazālī's interest in this verse in relation to spiritual experience or enlightenment of some kind. It is in *Mishkāt,* however, that al-Ghazālī follows Ibn Sīnā's epistemological model most closely (in what follows cf. Davidson 1992:130–44 and Abrahamov 1993:8–12). Table 6.2 shows a level of correspondence between Ibn Sīnā's and al-Ghazālī's categories indicating significant influence. This is not surprising given that, as argued in Chapter 3, al-Ghazālī's explanation in *Mishkāt* of the relationship between apparent and inner meanings of verses is presented with heavy reliance on Ibn Sīnā's theory of imaginative prophecy. Al-Ghazālī twice describes five types of human spirits, first to outline their characteristics, and then again to explain their correspondences to elements occurring in the Light Verse (al-Ghazālī 1998:39–45).[15] In addition to explaining these five spirits, al-Ghazālī offers interpretations of other aspects of the verse elsewhere in *Mishkāt,* which are also included in Table 6.2. In this table, the first references to Ibn Sīnā's terms are drawn from *Ishārāt,* the second from *Ithbāt,* while summaries of these texts' ideas reproduce those contained in Table 6.1. Al-Ghazālī's terminology will be explained following the table.

The niche, lamp and glass

As already stated, the niche for Ibn Sīnā represents the human potential, as yet completely unrealised, to receive the intelligibles (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:389) or, in *Ithbāt,* to be illuminated (Ibn Sīnā 1968:49–50; tr. 116). In *Mishkāt* it represents the basic capacity to perceive through the senses, which sets apart animal life from other life-forms, and which is found in even the youngest baby. There is a clear similarity here between the two authors, and a similarity between al-Ghazālī's *al-rūḥ al-ḥaywān* and Ibn Sīnā's terminology is also apparent.

Table 6.2 A comparison of Ibn Sīnā's and al-Ghazālī's interpretations of Q24:35

Ishārāt/Ithbāt		Mishkāt al-anwār
'aql hayūlānī/al-'aql al-hayūlānī	**Niche**	*al-rūḥ al-ḥassās*
'aql bi'l-fi'l/al-'aql al-mustafād bi'l-fi'l	**Lamp**	*al-rūḥ al-'aqlī*
'aql bi'l-malaka/that which mediates	**Glass**	*al-rūḥ al-khayālī*

between the two faculties Niche and Lamp		
fikra/al-quwwa al-fikriyya	**Olive tree**	*al-rūh al-fikrī*
ḥads/-	**Oil**	*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*
-/cogitative power neither purely rational nor purely animal	**Neither from East nor West**	intellectual propositions admit of neither direction nor distance
al-'aql al-fi'āl/al-'aql al-kullī	**Fire**	the source of *waḥy*
[the perfected form of actual thought]/-	**Light upon light**	*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī* when touched by the fire.

The lamp represents in *Ishārāt,* 'the intelligible which has been acquired but is no longer [actually] present' and which, 'may come about as if it were actually being observed' (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:392; tr. Gutas 1988:164]. Ibn Sīnā terms this *'aql bi'l-fi'l,* or, in *Ithbāt, al-'aql al-mustafād bi'l-fi'l.* According to al-Ghazālī, the rational spirit, *al-rūḥ al-'aqlī,* likewise represented by the lamp, deals with 'universal self-evident knowledge' *(al-ma'ārif al-ḍarūriyya al-kulliyya),* and is not found in children or animals (al-Ghazālī 1998:37). Again, there is resemblance in the understanding of this spirit or capacity.

Regarding the glass, terminological resemblance is absent. However, al-Ghazālī's *al-rūḥ al-khayālī* has an equivalent function to Ibn Sīnā's *'aql bi'l-malaka*. Al-Ghazālī states that the imaginative spirit deals with information conveyed from the senses, 'remembering it as something stored within itself, in order to present it to the rational spirit above it when there is need for it' (al-Ghazālī 1998:36). Similarly, in Ibn Sīnā the intellect *in habitu* is the second stage, above the material intellect, necessary to enable the third stage, that of actual intellect, to occur (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:390; tr. Gutas 1988:164).

The olive tree and the oil

For an enquiry into what al-Ghazālī wishes to communicate through his interpretation of the Light Verse the most significant area for discussion is the capacities symbolised by the olive tree and the oil. The central issue is the relationship between, on the one hand, Ibn Sīnā's reflection and intuition, *fikra* and *ḥads,* and, on the other, al-Ghazālī's fourth and fifth spirits, *al-rūḥ al-fikrī* and *al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī.* As already noted, Ibn Sīnā sometimes refers to *ḥads* as *al-quwwa al-qudsīyya*. Once again, terminological resemblances are evident, but it is more important to probe al-Ghazālī's intention in using such terms.

As with the other categories, al-Ghazālī first describes the human spirit, then later explains how it is represented in the Light Verse. Here is his initial description of the fourth, reflective spirit:

> It takes pure rational knowledge and brings about combinations and pairings, deducing therefrom noble knowledge. Then, for example, when it derives two conclusions, it combines the two anew and derives another conclusion. It never ceases increasing in this manner *ad infinitum*.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:37)

In his second discussion he adds the following:

> It begins with a single root and then branches off from it into two branches. Then from each branch grow two branches, and so on until the branches of rational divisions become many. Then, at last, it reaches conclusions that are its fruits. These fruits then go back and become seeds for similar fruits, because some of them can fertilize others so that they continue to bear fruits beyond them. This is similar to what we mentioned in the book *The Just Balance*. Hence it is most appropriate that in this world the similitude of the reflective spirit be the tree.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:40)

This is clearly referring to syllogistic reasoning, as the reference to *Qisṭās* emphasises. Al-Ghazālī adds that the tree must be the olive since this produces oil with the capacity to make lamps radiant.

In concluding his discussion of the fourth spirit, al-Ghazālī explains that the phrase 'neither of the east nor the west' points to the fact that the ramifications of these intellectual propositions do not admit of distance or direction. This differs from Ibn Sīnā's remark in *Ithbāt* that the cogitative faculty is neither purely rational nor purely animal, and thus neither wholly in light, represented by the east, nor in darkness, represented by the west. This difference suggests that al-Ghazālī is probably following *Ishārāt* rather than *Ithbāt,* since he devises his own interpretation when nothing appears in *Ishārāt*. Whether this particular echoing of *Ishārāt* derives from al-Ghazālī's not having read *Ithbāt,* or from knowing both texts and consciously choosing *Ishārāt* is not known.

Al-Ghazālī describes the fifth spirit, *al-rūḥ al-qudsi al-nabawī,* as:

> The holy prophetic spirit that is singled out for the prophets and some of the friends of God. Within it are disclosed flashes of the unseen, the properties of the next world, and some of the knowledge of the dominion of the heavens and the earth, or, rather, some of the lordly knowledge *that the rational and reflective spirits cannot reach* (emphasis added).
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:37)

Here al-Ghazālī clearly distinguishes what is accessible via the fifth spirit from what can be attained by the fourth or reflective spirit. He adds that this fifth spirit is referred to in Q42:52, which he quotes in full,[16] and also emphasises that it is, 'beyond the rational faculty *(warā'a al-'aql)*'. He terms the spirit *dhawq,* 'experience', or 'tasting', as Buchman translates, a term to be discussed further, and writes that 'Knowledge is above

faith and tasting is above knowledge; [this] because tasting is a finding' *(al-'ilm fawqa al-īmān wa'l-dhawq fawqa al-'ilm wa'l-dhawq wijdān). Dhawq* is implicitly contrasted here with *'ilm*.

This distinction between what is achievable through reason and what is beyond reasoning seems quite clear. However, when al-Ghazālī comes to explain the Light Verse's symbolism for the fifth spirit he appears to blur this distinction. In explaining why the fifth spirit is represented in the Qur'anic words, 'Its oil would almost shine, even if no fire has touched it' he states that

> The fifth spirit is the holy prophetic spirit, ascribed to the friends of God when it is in the utmost degree of purity and nobility. The reflective spirit is divided into [two kinds:] a sort that needs instruction, awakening, and help from the outside so that it may continue partaking of many types of knowledge; and another sort that has such intense purity that it is, as it were, awakened by itself without help from the outside.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:41)

These words show al-Ghazālī introducing a link between the fourth and fifth spirits. The term *al-rūḥ al-mufakkira* is used here to denote a spirit which can be divided into two categories. One aspect of this, reflection, depends on instruction and external supply. This can be taken to apply to the fourth spirit.[17] Another category, however, which is clearly presented as being a *related* phenomenon, needs no such supply, and is the intensely pure *al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*. In what way can these two spirits be said to share in a common aspect of the intellect, since previously al-Ghazālī had been at pains to contrast them? One possibility is that al-Ghazālī deliberately uses apparent contradiction to mask his true ideas. Abrahamov favours this view, drawing attention to a possible parallel in this type of inconsistency in al-Ghazālī's *Kitāb al-Arba'īn* (Abrahamov 1988:81–94). However, as this is the only possible instance of such a phenomenon in *Mishkāt* there seems insufficient evidence to solve the problem definitively in this way, even if such a possibility were to be accepted in principle.[18]

The notion that the fourth and fifth spirits are two means to attain the same knowledge is termed the two-fold approach in what follows, since its proponents argue in essence that there is a two-fold path to reach the same destination. This is the stance adopted by Davidson and Abrahamov, and it is certainly understandable in the light of some statements by al-Ghazālī, which can be briefly reviewed here.

Describing the vision of those who know *(al-'ārifūn)* of 'the One, the Real' which subsumes all else, al-Ghazālī writes, 'Some of them possess this state as a cognitive gnosis *('irfān 'ilmī)*. Others, however, attain this through a state of tasting. Plurality is totally banished from them, and they become immersed in sheer singularity' (al-Ghazālī 1998:17). Ambiguity exists over whether the knowledge and experience gained by the two methods is the same. They are introduced as such, but 'plurality' falling away from the second might represent a substantive difference between the two groups. Another example occurs towards the end of *Mishkāt,* where the author describes those who attain the highest place. This group is subdivided, since some attain their ascent gradually, while for others, as al-Ghazālī says elsewhere, 'The revelation of Himself rushes upon them at once… It is likely that the first path is that of the Friend [Abraham], while the

second path is that of the Beloved [Muhammad]' (al-Ghazālī 1998:52). Here the implication is that the ascent is to the same summit, but by different means.

So there is an ambiguity in al-Ghazālī's thinking over whether the fifth spirit leads the individual to a different destination than the fourth spirit, or to the same destination by a different route. This ambiguity can be traced through other works. References to the two-fold approach also occur in *Iḥyā'*. In Book XXI, *Kitāb Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb,* al-Ghazālī describes how to bring to actuality the human potential for the highest knowledge:

> This knowledge comes to some hearts through divine inspiration *(ilhām ilāhī)* by way of immediate disclosure *(mubāda'a)* and unveiling *(mukāshafa),* and for some it is a thing to be learned and acquired. Sometimes it is gained quickly and sometimes slowly.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:8; tr. 28, adapted)

'This knowledge' seems here to refer to the same ultimate goal reached by two different paths. Furthermore, part of the title of Chapter Eight of *'Ajā'ib* reads, 'The Difference Between the Sufi Way of the Unveiling of Reality *(istikshāf al-ḥaqq)* and that of Speculation *(naẓar)*'. Yet this 'Sufi way' is described in the terms of the two-fold approach:

> Know that the sciences which are not axiomatic but which come into the heart at certain times, differ in their manner of attainment. Sometimes they come upon the heart as though something were flung into it from a source it knows not. At other times they are gained through deduction *(istidlāl)* and study. That which is not attained by way of acquisition nor through the cunning of proof is called general inspiration *(ilhām),* and that which is attained through inference is called reflection *(i'tibār)* and mental perception *(istibṣār).*
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:17; tr. 70)

Ilhām here is the equivalent of *ḥads.* It is subdivided into two types:

> In the first the man is not aware how he achieved it, nor whence; in the second he is acquainted with the secondary cause from which he derived that knowledge, which is the vision of the angel who casts it into his heart. The former is called general inspiration, and inbreathing into the heart. The latter is called prophetic revelation *(waḥy)*.... *Ilhām,* then does not differ from acquiring as regards the knowledge itself, its seat, and its cause, but it differs only in the removal of the veil for this is not accomplished by man's volition. General inspiration does not differ from prophetic revelation in any of these respects, but only in the matter of the vision of the angel who imparts knowledge.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:17–18; tr. 70–2, adapted)

Al-Ghazālī here minimises any firm distinction between prophets and others. Later he makes explicit the logical implication of this position in discussing Muhammad's ability to speak accurately about the unknown and the future:

> If that is permissible in the case of the Prophet it is also permissible for others. For a prophet is merely a person to whom the true nature of things has been disclosed, and who works for the reformation of mankind. So it is not impossible that there should exist a person to whom the true nature of things has been disclosed, but who does not work for the reformation of mankind. Such a man is not called a prophet, but a saint *(walī)*.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:24; tr. 98)

This conclusion must follow from the previous statements that there is no difference between prophets and others in the knowledge acquired, but only in the process of its acquisition. This view of prophecy is most probably drawn from Ibn Sīnā. As Morris notes, for Ibn Sīnā, since many classes of people can participate to varying degrees in exercising *hads*, 'what is unique about prophets is not their simple possession of such psychic capacities, but the particular way or the purposes for which they use such powers' (Morris 1992:192). Elsewhere in *'Ajā'ib* al-Ghazālī emphasises that, 'no item of knowledge is acquired except for two preceding items of knowledge which are related and combined in a special way' (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:13; tr. 52), a reference to syllogistic reasoning. So is all prophecy received by a process reducible to such reasoning? Much as a neat solution is desirable, perhaps the most that can be said is that al-Ghazālī had at the time of writing *Ajā'ib* not yet fully integrated his fascination with Ibn Sīnā's epistemological views with his own ideas.

The two-fold approach, whereby the fourth and fifth spirits lead to the same destination, also occurs, in a slightly different form, in Book XXXIX of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb al-Tafakkur*. Here al-Ghazālī states the following:

> The way of using syllogism is obtained either by a divine light in the heart, which is an inborn quality *nūr ilāhi fi'l-qalb yaḥsulu bi'l-fiṭra*, as is the case with most prophets, or by learning and exercising, which is the case with most people.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:412; tr. Abrahamov 1993:162)[19]

Here there is a slight difference in the presentation of the relationship of the two methods. The 'divine light' does not bypass the need for syllogistic reasoning but rather provides the means to practise it. Abrahamov asks why a prophet would need the ability to understand syllogisms, and answers that al-Ghazālī believes there to be nothing beyond syllogistic reasoning. Abrahamov uses this conclusion to interpret *Mishkāt,* but in so doing appears to commit the same methodological error which Watt (1961:127) criticises in the work of Jabre. This is to underplay the possibility of chronological development in al-Ghazālī's thought—caution is needed in using one al-Ghazālī text to interpret another regardless of their apparent date of composition.

What emerges is that at the time of writing *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazālī did not see a need to adapt Ibn Sīnā's two-fold scheme for acquisition of the highest knowledge to make it fit a more traditional Sufi model which emphasises a realm beyond reason. However, whether the same view occurs in *Mishkāt* is a separate question, to be addressed after other elements of the Light Verse have been considered.

The fire and light upon light

Al-Ghazālī does not refer to the fire in his main discussion of the interpretation of the Light Verse. However, in an earlier section of *Mishkāt* he states that the fire is, 'that by which the lamp itself is kindled' (al-Ghazālī 1998:13). He also terms it as:

> The high divine spirit that has been described by 'Alī and Ibn 'Abbās, both of whom said, 'God has an angel who has seventy thousand faces; in every face are seventy thousand tongues, through all of which he glorifies God'. It is this angel who stands before all the other angels, for it is said that the day of resurrection is 'the day when the Spirit and the angels shall stand in line' (Q78:38).
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:13)

So the fire symbolises the 'Spirit', or an angel of particularly high status. Fire is also described as the symbol for the source of revelation (*waḥy*) which kindles the Lamp, representing the spirit of a prophet (al-Ghazālī 1998:30).

It is clear that the function al-Ghazālī attributes to the fire has some resemblance to the Active Intellect in Ibn Sīnā's scheme—a non-corporeal being which conveys divine communication to humankind. Furthermore, for Ibn Sīnā, the purest reception of the Active Intellect's transmission constitutes prophecy. Davidson (1992:142) concludes that in *Mishkāt* al-Ghazālī discusses the Active Intellect, since in this text spirits supernal, an angel or 'prototypical divine Scripture' all seem to be 'locutions for the active intellect'.

However, if al-Ghazālī takes the fire to symbolise a figure equivalent to the Active Intellect, is he advancing a form of emanationist cosmology? Davidson concedes that, for al-Ghazālī, God may not be the emanating cause of the universe, but notes that the incorporeal intelligences nevertheless emanate from one another, and the souls of the spheres from the intelligences (Davidson 1992:136).[20] He bases this view on al-Ghazālī's account of supernal spirits in ascending grades. Immediately following the references to the fire discussed here, al-Ghazālī writes as follows:

> If the heavenly lights from which the earthly lights become kindled have a hierarchy such that one light kindles another, then the light nearest to the First Source is more worthy of the name 'light' because it is highest in level. The way to perceive a similitude of this hierarchy in the visible world is to suppose that moonlight enters through a window of a house,

> falls upon a mirror attached to a wall, is reflected from the mirror to an opposite wall, and turns from that wall to the earth so as to illuminate it… These four lights are ranked in levels such that some are higher and more perfect than others.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:13–14)

Gairdner denies that such a passage has emanationism in view, stating that it is simply Sufi imagery (Gairdner 1914:140). Lazarus-Yafeh (1975:308–9) takes the same view for different reasons. She argues that al-Ghazālī never introduces the notion of emanation directly into discussions where he uses such language and images. Instead he simply plays linguistically with the image of light flowing while never entertaining ideas which would have stepped outside orthodoxy.

However, there is a possible parallel to al-Ghazālī's use of the image of light in the writings of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. They write that the generosity and virtues in God emanate from him just as light and brightness emanate from the sun (Ikhwān 1957:III:196–7; cf. Netton 1982:35). Yet elsewhere they make clear that God exercised deliberate choice in the processes of creation and emanation (Ikhwān 1957:III:338). Al-Ghazālī certainly exhibits a fascination with the concept of radiation or emanation expressed in the term *fayḍ,* also used by the Ikhwān. *Mishkāt* opens with the words, 'Praise belongs to God, Effuser of lights *(fā'iḍ al-anwār)* (al-Ghazālī 1998:1). In addition, 'There are in the world of dominion noble and high luminous substances called "angels." Lights effuse *(tafīḍu)* from these angels upon human spirits' (al-Ghazālī 1998:27).

Perhaps, then, the Ikhwān are al-Ghazālī's inspiration for the blend of creation and emanation subtly introduced into *Mishkāt*. As already noted in Chapter 3, *Mishkāt* carries other signs of the influence of the *Rasā'il,* making this suggestion at least plausible.

There is an interesting parallel passage in al-Ghazālī's *al-Maqṣad al-asnā,* a work clearly earlier than *Mishkāt* since it is mentioned in it (al-Ghazālī 1998:17). In arguing that, from a certain perspective, all existence is one, al-Ghazālī writes as follows:

> Everything in existence is a light from the lights of the eternal power *(al-qudra al-azaliyya)* and a trace from its traces. And as the sun is the source of light radiating to *(al-fā'iḍ 'alā)* every illuminated thing, so in a similar fashion the meaning *(al-ma'nā)* which words fall short of expressing—though it was necessarily expressed as 'the eternal power'—is the source of existence radiating to every existent thing.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1971a:58; tr. 46)[21]

There is no mention here of a figure like the 'Spirit' symbolised by the fire in *Mishkāt,* yet the same interest in 'radiating' (or 'emanating', depending on the interpretation given to al-Ghazālī's intention), is apparent. It would seem that in relation to the fire, both Ibn Sīnā and the Ikhwān are an active influence. So does al-Ghazālī believe that the universe emanated from God rather than being created by him? Al-Ghazālī's language is elusive, but this would seem unlikely, primarily because of his strong belief in God's

unconstrained will to do as he pleases at any moment. This view goes against the necessity inherent in beginning the process of emanation as understood in the Neoplatonic tradition, whereby God is kept at one remove from the actual process of bringing into being subordinate levels of the celestial hierarchy and of creation in general.

Finally, attention can be given to al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the phrase 'Light upon light', which also resembles that of Ibn Sīnā. In *Ishārāt* this phrase is taken to describe when 'The intelligibles come about actually in [the soul], observed and represented in the mind…. This perfection is called 'acquired intellect *('aql mustafād)*' (Ibn Sīnā 1958:II:391; tr. Gutas 1988:164).

Al-Ghazālī states that when the transcendental spirit of prophecy is touched by the fire it becomes, 'Light upon light' (al-Ghazālī 1998:13). Both writers thus take the phrase to be describing the high point in human reception of knowledge from the divine realm.[22] This is a further indication of al-Ghazālī's borrowing specifically from *Ishārāt* rather than *Ithbāt* since he follows one of two possible usages of Ibn Sīnā. This adds to the evidence that *Ithbāt* is not in fact influencing al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the Light Verse in *Mishkāt*.

Implications for al-Ghazālī's view of reason

Having sought to demonstrate that al-Ghazālī borrows substantially from *Ishārāt* in his interpretation of the Light Verse, the two questions mentioned at the outset of this chapter can now be addressed. First, to what extent is al-Ghazālī's borrowing from Ibn Sīnā creative, and second, what are the implications of al-Ghazālī's at least partial dependence on his predecessor? In short, is there knowledge which is accessible only by going beyond what reason can provide?

The question of whether al-Ghazālī's borrowing is creative is not straightforward. Both Davidson and Abrahamov assume that al-Ghazālī's reliance on Ibn Sīnā exposes his true belief that the fullest knowledge of God is purely intellectual. Davidson (1992:105) states explicitly that there is no mystical component to Ibn Sīnā's exposition of intuition *(ḥads)* and conjunction *(ittiṣāl)*. Abrahamov (1993:165) implies the same, stating that al-Ghazālī believes that 'man is capable of attaining the highest stage through his endeavours which cannot be but intellectual'. Yet this view rests on the assumption that to identify influences on a text is sufficient to explain its author's thought.

Davidson's and Abrahamov's conclusion that there is no actual Sufi framework behind al-Ghazālī's terminology requires them to argue that he uses Sufi terminology in order to conceal his true thoughts on cognition (Davidson 1992:180; Abrahamov 1993:167). However, their accounts of why al-Ghazālī uses Sufi terms, especially *dhawq,* raise as many questions as they answer. Davidson argues that al-Ghazālī understands the 'direct experience' referred to by *dhawq* to consist of recognising the unity of God, or *tawḥīd:*

> Direct experience is, accordingly, nothing ineffable or ecstatic. It is a heightened human realization that since God alone exists necessarily by virtue of Himself, everything else in the universe, including man, is as

> naught. If, as I have suggested, the expression *direct experience* is a veiled equivalent of insight, the passages quoted in this paragraph say that only the person of insight can fully comprehend the unity of God.
>
> (Davidson 1992:140–1)

Davidson here refers to *ḥads* when using the term 'insight'. His summary seems reductive, since, as argued earlier, Ibn Sīnā envisages some kind of direct contact with a higher power, contact which goes beyond intellectual comprehension of God divorced from experience. Hence, even if al-Ghazālī is merely borrowing Ibn Sīnā's conceptual framework wholesale, it could be argued that direct, supra-rational encounter with the divine—some form of Sufism—could be in view.

Abrahamov writes as follows:

> *Dhawq* in this context is not mystical experience, since the latter is a state, whereas the former is a faculty of the soul…the real meaning of *dhawq* is the best intellectual faculty of the soul which enables man to perceive what could not be perceived by other faculties of the soul.
>
> (Abrahamov 1993:166)

There are three potential problems with this position. First, it over-emphasises the distinction between an experience and a faculty of the soul. Possessing the faculty of *dhawq* could also involve experiences that could be classified as Sufi. Second, there is a development in al-Ghazālī's use of the term *dhawq*. Brewster surveys the references to *dhawq* in *Iḥyā'* and *Munqidh* discussed by Jabre and Watt, and his analysis confirms Watt's view that development occurs (Brewster 1975:268–72; cf. Watt 1961:127–8). In *Iḥyā'* *dhawq* is used in a variety of ways. It can refer to the physical sense of taste (al-Ghazālī n.d.: II:9; IV:34, 107 [not 108 as Brewster states], 289, 300). It can also refer to intuitive apprehension as by a lawyer who distinguishes between two points of law by *dhawq* since the difference is so fine as to evade reason (al-Ghazālī n.d.: II:291) and to the perception of the true nature of love or death (al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:340, 445 respectively). However, it can also refer to the immediate apprehension of religious truth which yields the inner meaning of a text. This is stated in a passage from *Iḥyā'* Book II, *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*. This passage occurs as part of the account of five categories of secret knowledge already discussed in Chapter 3. Al-Ghazālī describes the fourth category as follows:

> Where man comprehends the thing in a general way and then through verification and experience *(bi'l-taḥqīq wa'l-dhawq)* he understands its particulars so that it becomes part of him… Thus the first is the exoteric or outward, the second is the esoteric or inward.
>
> (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:102; tr. 46, adapted)

Elsewhere in *Iḥyā'* there are apparently conflicting statements regarding the role of reason. On the one hand, as referred to earlier, there is a reference to the two-fold

approach in *Kitāb al-Tafakkur*. By contrast, as Watt points out, al-Ghazālī writes in Book XXXII of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa'l-Shukr,* 'Reason grasps nothing of the domain of the Lord. What is in this domain is known by another light, nobler and higher than reason' (Watt 1961:127, quoting al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:112).

Thus, while *dhawq* usually has a non-mystical sense in *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazālī undoubtedly indicates at points his belief in a domain beyond reason. The use of the term *dhawq* in connection with such a realm in *Munqidh* will be outlined shortly. However, in view of the complex evidence in *Iḥyā'* it is unwise to use *Kitāb al-Tafakkur* to interpret *Mishkāt* without regard for the possible passage of time between their composition, and the possible intervening development in al-Ghazālī's use of the term *dhawq*.

The third problem with Abrahamov's argument is his statement that *dhawq* enables a person to perceive what otherwise cannot be perceived. However, such a claim undercuts the basis of his own argument. Abrahamov's understanding of Ibn Sīnā's thought requires there to be no difference regarding what can be worked out from syllogisms and what is available directly from intuition. Only the means of acquisition differs.[23] Hence Abrahamov's proposed parallel between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā breaks down, since in Abrahamov's view there is no space in Ibn Sīnā's system for a special faculty which is both intellectual, yet which takes a person beyond the scope of other rational faculties which use syllogisms. It is therefore inconsistent to argue that al-Ghazālī could both follow Ibn Sīnā closely yet also to suggest the existence of such a faculty.

To recapitulate, two assumptions are embedded in the work of Davidson and Abrahamov. First, Ibn Sīnā is in no way a Sufi thinker. Second, al-Ghazālī's apparent reliance on Ibn Sīnā must define the limits of the former's thought. Their conclusion, based on these two assumptions, is that al-Ghazālī cannot therefore be a Sufi thinker. Yet both of these assumptions are vulnerable to criticism (or perhaps it could be said that the syllogism is based on faulty premises). It can perhaps be argued that Ibn Sīnā, in *Ishārāt,* gives evidence of describing some form of Sufism. However, whether or not this is accepted, it does not automatically follow that al-Ghazālī's borrowing of Ibn Sīnā's categories indicates that he limits his own scheme and thinking entirely to fit those of Ibn Sīnā. As part of addressing this second issue, evidence from texts other than *Mishkāt,* in addition to that already cited from *Iḥyā'*, can be examined to help to determine whether al-Ghazālī's epistemology moves beyond reliance on reason.

Evidence from other texts

A full discussion of al-Ghazālī's views on reason and its limits is beyond the scope of the present discussion. Instead attention will be drawn to a few examples suggesting al-Ghazālī's belief in the possibility of knowledge gained by supra-rational means.

The first is the frequent references al-Ghazālī makes to well-known Sufi authors, evident in al-Ghazālī's attitude to the famous early Sufi al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261 or 264/874 or 877–8). Quasem (1993:143–6) shows that al-Ghazālī not only gives partial affirmation to al-Bisṭāmī, but even goes so far as to explain at what points he agrees and disagrees with this early Sufi. This approach would not seem to fit the view of al-Ghazālī as a writer who uses Sufi terminology merely as a screen for his own more rationalist views.

It must be granted that such evidence, when scattered through a work such as *Iḥyā*, occurs along with examples of the two-fold approach in that work. Perhaps, as often with al-Ghazālī, the most that can be said is that the evidence cannot be harmonised, but this is preferable to attempting a harmonisation which the evidence resists.

Second, al-Ghazālī's discussion of reason in relation to Sufism in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* deserves comment (al-Ghazālī 1971a:170–1; cf. tr. 156–8). Al-Ghazālī argues that a saint *(wālī)* might discern something unknown to reason, 'because reason falls short of it'. However, it is impossible for him to discern something contradictory to reason, such as that God might create another being like himself. Al-Ghazālī concludes that 'Whoever cannot distinguish what contradicts reason from what reason cannot attain is beneath being addressed, so let him be left in his ignorance' (al-Ghazālī 1971a:171a; tr. 1992:158).

This would also seem to be a fair summary of al-Ghazālī's stance in *Mishkāt,* even though *Mishkāt* lacks such an explicit statement. While it is possible that al-Ghazālī changed his view between the writing of the two works, the existence of such a statement in an earlier work should be considered as contributing evidence, even if not decisive in itself, in the process of interpreting *Mishkāt*. The key word here is 'contributing'. To go further by claiming that it constitutes proof would be to contradict the argument given earlier highlighting the need for caution in using one Ghazālīan text to interpret another without regard for their chronology.

In addition to al-Ghazālī's discussion of earlier Sufis, and the evidence from *Maqṣad*, a third and important source of evidence regarding reason and the Sufi way as paths to the highest knowledge of God is *Munqidh*. As noted in Chapter 3, *Mishkāt* pre-dates *Munqidh*. However, this need not exclude completely a role for *Munqidh* in guiding interpretation of *Mishkāt,* written just a few years before.

As Abrahamov acknowledges (1993:166), al-Ghazālī uses the term *dhawq* with a Sufi sense in *Munqidh*. In fact al-Ghazālī explicitly contrasts demonstration, reason, or the workings of the intellect with experience of God's light on several occasions in *Munqidh*. His peace of mind, enabling him to accept the self-evident data of reason, was restored after two months of confusion:

> My soul regained its health and strength… But that was not achieved by constructing a proof or putting together an argument. On the contrary, it was the effect of a light which God Most High cast into my breast. And that light is the key to most knowledge.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1959:13–14; tr. 66)

Such comments are echoed elsewhere. Beyond the intellectual stage of acquisition of knowledge there is another stage far removed from it (al-Ghazālī 1959:41–2; tr. 97). Reason hands us over to the prophets as blind people are entrusted to guides (al-Ghazālī 1959:46; tr. 102). There could be in religious ordinances aspects which can only be perceived by prophecy, not by reason (al-Ghazālī 1959:51–2; tr. 110). Indeed Muhammad reached a stage beyond reason (al-Ghazālī 1959:54; tr. 112). Most significantly for this enquiry, al-Ghazālī employs the triad of *īmān, 'ilm* and *dhawq* (faith,

knowledge and experience) in *Munqidh* in the same way as in *Mishkāt,* again affirming the superiority of *dhawq,* as a brief comparison will demonstrate.

Munqidh reads, 'Ascertainment by demonstrable proof leads to knowledge *('ilm)*. Intimate experience of that very state is experience *(dhawq)*. Favourable acceptance of it based on hearsay and experience of others is faith *(īmān)*' (al-Ghazālī 1959:40; tr. 95–6, adapted). Similarly, *Mishkāt* states that 'knowledge *('ilm)* is above faith *(īmān)* and experience *(dhawq)* is above knowledge' (al-Ghazālī 1998:38, adapted translation). The term *dhawq* occurs 11 times in *Munqidh,* referring in one instance to the physical sense of taste (al-Ghazālī 1959:41; tr. 97). On every other occasion it refers to a state of immediate apprehension, a typical comment being that '*Dhawq*…is comparable to actual seeing and handling: this is found only in the way of the Sufis' (al-Ghazālī 1959:44; tr. 100). The point of all these comments is that Sufi' experience, which al-Ghazālī happens to term *dhawq,* is the supreme way to know God. In fact al-Ghazālī's affirmation of Sufism would appear to be the overriding aim of the whole work.[24]

Abrahamov states the following:

> The fact that *dhawq* occurs as a Ṣufic way in *al-Munqidh* should not contradict what al-Ghazālī states in *Mishkāt*. For what one must search for, to use al-Ghazālī's notion, is not words or terms but their real meaning.
>
> (Abrahamov 1993:166)

The argument here is that we should interpret the meaning of *dhawq* in *Munqidh* in line with its use in *Mishkāt,* which Abrahamov understands to denote a rational process. However, al-Ghazālī in *Munqidh* is several times so emphatic in contrasting *dhawq* and reason that such evidence cannot be so readily dismissed. Since *Mishkāt* pre-dates the composition of *Munqidh* it might be argued that it represents a transitional phase on the way to the more clear-cut break with reason found in *Munqidh*. Even so, there is insufficient evidence to identify exactly what point in that process of transition *Mishkāt* represents.

The evidence of the present chapter suggests a more complex picture, rather than a gradual and traceable movement in al-Ghazālī's thought away from reliance on reason towards emphasis on *dhawq* as Sufi experience. Statements stressing the need to move beyond reason are found earlier than *Mishkāt,* notably in *Iḥyā'* and *Maqṣad.* To maintain that *Munqidh* has no bearing on a reading of *Mishkāt* because of post-dating it by a short period would therefore seem to demand too much from the evidence of dating alone. If *Munqidh* is allowed influence over a reading of *Mishkāt,* it strongly suggests taking seriously the view that for al-Ghazālī, the oil being touched by the fire represents some kind of experiential encounter with God.

Other interpretations in *Mishkāt*

Interpretation of other Qur'anic verses plays a minor role in *Mishkāt* in comparison with the central place given to the Light Verse. However, there are a considerable number of

brief comments and interpretations in the text, and attention will be drawn here to a few which relate to the themes already discussed, and to others of particular importance.

Al-Ghazālī interprets some verses in a way related to his epistemological scheme outlined via the Light Verse. Hence these can also be said to reflect the influence of Ibn Sīnā, at least in the source of their ideas. For example, Muhammad is named 'an illuminating beacon' (Q33:46) because he is imbued with the holy prophetic spirit (al-Ghazālī 1998:13). Al-Ghazālī also finds reference to this spirit in the phrase 'And that is how We revealed to you a Spirit by Our command' (Q42:52) (al-Ghazālī 1998:37; these two interpretations are also found together—see al-Ghazālī 1998:30). Furthermore, it is hard not to discern echoes of the epistemological scheme, when, having once read *Mishkāt* in its entirety, the reader returns to al-Ghazālī's early comments on the verse, 'So We lifted your cover from you and your vision today is keen' (Q50:22). Al-Ghazālī remarks, 'This covering is the covering of imagination *(khayāl),* fancy, and other things' (al-Ghazālī 1998:9).

There are also interpretations reflecting the influence of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Reference was made in Chapter 3 to al-Ghazālī's reliance on them in interpreting Q13:17 in *Mishkāt*. In addition, al-Ghazālī interprets Moses' indirect answers to Pharaoh's question, 'And what is the Lord of the Worlds?' (Q26:23–27) as a refusal to inquire into God's quiddity *(māhiyya)*. This interpretation also seems to be drawn from the *Rasā'il* (al-Ghazālī 1998:28; cf. Ikhwān 1957:III:513, as noted by Landolt 1991:29).

Al-Ghazālī offers another interpretation which could be seen as the converse of his interpretation of the Light Verse, since it deals with unbelief and ignorance, rather than faith and knowledge. In a passage which quotes from Q24:40 he writes as follows:

> The rational faculties of the unbelievers are inverted, and so are the rest of their faculties of perception, and these faculties help one another in leading them astray. Hence, a similitude of them is like a man 'in a fathomless ocean covered by a wave above which is a wave above which are clouds, darknesses piled one upon the other'.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:42, with Buchman's Qur'an translation)

According to al-Ghazālī, the terms 'ocean' and 'fathomless' refer to this world. The first wave symbolises those things, 'which call out to the bestial attributes, occupation with sensory pleasures, and achievement of the wishes of this world'. The second wave refers to attributes causing, 'anger, enmity, hatred, malice, envy, boastfulness, vainglory, and arrogance'. Al-Ghazālī adds that 'it is appropriate that this be the higher wave, because more often than not anger takes control away from the appetites' (al-Ghazālī 1998:42). There is a combination here of speculative symbolism and carefully formulated reasons for it which is characteristic of al-Ghazālī. The clouds represent, 'loathsome beliefs, lying opinions, and corrupt imaginings that have veiled the unbelievers from faith'. These waves and clouds, al-Ghazālī concludes, are appropriately called 'darknesses'. An echo of the Ikhwān and their interpretation of Q13:17, referred to in three works by al-Ghazālī, is audible behind this particular *ta'wīl*.

Finally in this survey there is a striking example of the different treatments which al-Ghazālī can give to a single verse. In *Qisṭās*, as discussed in the previous chapter, he draws on Abraham's statement, 'I do not like those that set' (Q6:76) and the surrounding

account of Abraham's reactions to the moon, stars and sun as an example of the Qur'an's inclusion of the second figure of the categorical syllogism. In *Mishkāt,* by contrast, the same Qur'anic account is used to very different purpose:

> There are in the world of dominion noble and high luminous substances called 'angels'. Lights effuse from these angels upon human spirits… These angels have diverse levels in their luminosity. Hence, it is appropriate for their similitude in the visible world to be the sun, moon and the stars.
>
> (al-Ghazālī 1998:27–8)

Al-Ghazālī goes on to show that the spiritual traveller *(al-sālik)* ascends from the level of the stars to that of the moon, and then to that of the sun. Once again it is important to state that these contrasting ways of interpreting the same Qur'anic passage need not be understood as a contradiction, from al-Ghazālī's viewpoint. In accordance with his own hermeneutical theories already outlined, he might consider it quite usual to find more than one hidden meaning in a passage.

Conclusion

As noted both in the preceding paragraphs and elsewhere, the influence of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' is detectable in *Mishkāt*. However, the most prominent presence shaping the interpretation of the Light Verse itself is Ibn Sīnā's *Ishārāt,* not the similar interpretation found in *Ithbāt*. What were al-Ghazālī's intentions in borrowing in this way? Might it indicate al-Ghazālī's belief that syllogistic reasoning, exercised gradually or grasped through sudden illumination, leads to the highest knowledge of God? In the light of the foregoing discussion, two other options seem more plausible. First, al-Ghazālī might understand Ibn Sīnā in *Ishārāt* to be advocating a philosophically rigorous form of Sufism. Second, al-Ghazālī might be borrowing Ibn Sīnā's interpretive framework and investing it with new, more Sufi meaning. Some factors in support of al-Ghazālī's theology having a Sufi element are his willingness to cite as influences the names of well-known earlier Sufis, the evidence of his discussion in *Maqṣad* and the arguments of *Munqidh* that *dhawq* is superior to reason.

There is sufficient evidence to claim that in *Mishkāt* al-Ghazālī's theology can be described as Sufi, despite the reliance of the interpretation of the Light Verse on Ibn Sīnā. It seems fair to state that al-Ghazālī was a Sufi by conviction, whether or not he was also one by experience. Davidson and Abrahamov are correct in believing that al-Ghazālī was not concerned with the significance of particular terms. However, they overestimate his degree of concern for the implications of the frameworks he constructs or adopts in the course of his arguments. Perhaps al-Ghazālī understands Ibn Sīnā to be advocating a philosophically rigorous form of Sufism which could accommodate his own ideas, or, as seems equally likely, he borrowed and altered his predecessor's ideas. It is possible that both these assessments of al-Ghazālī are true. A completely satisfactory harmonisation of the different strands of al-Ghazālī's thought remains out of reach, but Watt's remark is fair: 'The conception of a faculty above reason was one line of thought which he

followed in certain contexts, and which in his last years was the dominant line' (Watt 1961:127).

As outlined in Chapter 3, al-Ghazālī advocates in several works the complementarity of apparent and inner meanings of a Qur'anic text. In *Mishkāt* his elaboration of this basic point draws on Ibn Sīnā's theory of imaginative prophecy and the consequent need for *ta'wīl*. In the case of the Light Verse al-Ghazālī has apparently gained access to inner meanings of the passage with considerable help from Ibn Sīnā. Yet he has used this help to construct a work which can most coherently be read as claiming that the supreme way to know God is through some form of mystical experience.

Conclusion

Al-Ghazālī's ideas on *ta'wīl* can now be drawn together, and after a summary of the findings thus far, some general conclusions will be advanced. Part I explored six texts dealing with hermeneutical theories. Chapters 1 and 2 dealt with works which, following a quotation from al-Ghazālī himself, dealt with 'activities of this world'. Chapter 1, discussing *Fayṣal al-tafriqa,* demonstrated that a defensive agenda was at work in al-Ghazālī's arguments regarding *ta'wīl.* This defence is conducted in relation not to particular interpretations, but to presuppositions regarding interpretation, and their implications for charging someone with unbelief. Al-Ghazālī develops an elaborate hierarchy of types of existence and corresponding types of interpretation as a means of asserting the alleged objectivity of any interpretation. He further bolsters the case for his objectivity by an appeal to syllogistic logic. *Fayṣal* argues for a policy of latitude in interpretation, but a tightly controlled latitude dependent on specialised knowledge (of syllogistic logic) for its correct implementation. As such, *Fayṣal* appears to be more a rhetorical appeal than a practical guide to Qur'an interpretation.

The discussion in Chapter 2 of *ta'wil* in *al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl* serves a very different function. It is a cautious discussion, in the tradition of manuals of *uṣūl* al-fiqh, and is both a handbook for students and a Shāfi'ī criticism of Ḥanafī approaches to interpretation. This work also highlights the fact that the term *ta'wīl* cannot accurately be described merely as interpretation of figurative language, since the phrase 'figurative language' does not accurately cover the semantic range of expressions which, according to al-Ghazālī, require *ta'wīl,* for example those involving pleonasm and ellipsis. Furthermore, *Mustaṣfā* shows that the term *ta'wīl* does not denote exclusively a process of interpretation, but can also refer to the meaning arrived at after the act of interpretation. Comparing *Fayṣal* and *Mustaṣfā* illustrates al-Ghazālī's flexibility and diversity in writing such different works on interpretation.

Chapter 3 examined four works exhibiting various types of Sufi influence. The hermeneutical concerns of these were classified, again using al-Ghazālī's words, as 'activities of the hereafter'. Three of these works assume that every Qur'anic text has both an apparent and inner meaning, the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin,* which complement each other rather than being in conflict. Book VIII of *Iḥyā', Kitāb Ādāb tilāwat al-Qur'an,* employs arguments principally from hadiths and reason to argue the need for *ta'wīl,* while *Jāwāhir al-Qur'ān* establishes a classification for types of Qur'anic verse and corresponding intellectual disciplines associated with those types. *Mishkāt al-anwār* argues for the necessity of *ta'wīl* on perhaps the most surprising grounds of all—a theory of Qur'anic revelation based on the notions of imaginative prophecy advanced by al-Fārābī and, in particular, Ibn Sīnā.

By contrast with these three texts, Book II of *Iḥyā', Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aqā'id,* despite a clear Sufi context for its comments on *ta'wīl,* combines two different approaches, one of which has no connection with Sufism. One hermeneutical approach corresponds with that described earlier, that all Qur'anic verses possess an inner meaning. The second is non-mystical, addressing the interpretive issues raised by non-literal language, in which a text might or might not be open to *ta'wīl*. This corresponds to the approach discussed in the first two chapters of the present study. Why does al-Ghazālī combine these two approaches in one discussion without any hint of the different assumptions underlying them? A likely explanation is his desire to draw his reader gradually rather than abruptly towards a more Sufi understanding.

Turning from theory to practice, Part II of this study scrutinised al-Ghazālī's interpretations in the three works where he makes Qur'anic interpretation central to his concerns. Chapter 4 showed that in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* al-Ghazālī introduces a number of his theological views into his work via his interpretations of the Qur'an. These concern the nature of the paradise experienced by the *'ārifūn,* the need for *ta'wīl* of the Qur'an, the view that the principles of all intellectual disciplines can be found in the Qur'an, an emphasis on God's necessary rather than contingent being, the idea that this world is the best of all possible worlds and belief in God being the agent of all acts. Hence, although the purpose of *Jawāhir* is framed in Sufi terms, its Qur'anic interpretations are in fact largely concerned with non-Sufi ideas. In addition, al-Ghazālī structures some of his interpretations around the classification of Qur'anic verses he advances in the theoretical discussion in *Jawāhir,* analysed in Chapter 1. In this respect, therefore, there exists a harmony between hermeneutical theory and practice.

Chapter 5 addressed *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm*. This work was shown to be al-Ghazālī's attempt to integrate the two sources which he believes provide certain knowledge, namely the Qur'an and syllogistic logic. Al-Ghazālī sought to prove the Qur'anic basis of this logic in order to popularise it amongst the religious scholars of his day. Despite employing a framework of Sufi language to justify the concept of hidden meanings, al-Ghazālī goes on to expound interpretations which carry no Sufi associations. These interpretations centre on finding syllogisms embedded in Qur'anic passages, which al-Ghazālī manages to achieve with a generally acceptable level of accuracy. Whether these passages were ever intended to demonstrate syllogistic logic is doubtful, but in al-Ghazālī's scheme of ideas the presence of syllogisms in the Qur'an carries a particular importance. For al-Ghazālī this presence not only justifies logic as a legitimate instrument for use by Muslims, but also forms part of his argument that the principles of all types of knowledge are present in the Qur'an. This makes clear that *Qisṭās,* which has puzzled some commentators, is not such a surprising undertaking for al-Ghazālī as it might seem.

The treatment of *Mishkāt al-anwār* in Chapter 6 brought fully into view the frequently glimpsed influence of Ibn Sīnā on al-Ghazālī's thought. After outlining the dependence of al-Ghazālī's interpretation of Q24:35, the Light Verse, on the interpretation of Ibn Sīnā in *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt,* it was argued that this did not necessarily mean that al-Ghazālī's thought had no Sufi component. Like *Qisṭās, Mishkāt* exhibits al-Ghazālī's pre-occupation with the attainment of certain knowledge. In *Mishkāt,* however, in contrast to *Jawāhir* and *Qisṭās,* al-Ghazālī does indeed unite his Sufi theories of Qur'an

interpretation with his interpretive practice to argue for a Sufi understanding of response to God and knowledge of the spiritual realm.

These specific findings regarding al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic hermeneutics yield several broader conclusions. First, the relationship between his theories and practices is often tenuous. At times he advances a theory, while his interpretive practice in the same work ignores it. Of all the texts discussed, *Mishkāt* reveals the greatest degree of harmony between theory and practice, but this harmony derives from al-Ghazālī's drawing inspiration from the hermeneutical theory and practice of Ibn Sīnā.

Second, al-Ghazālī does not aim to advance a general or comprehensive theory of *ta'wīl*. Instead he offers a number of discussions which give the impression of being tailored to the target readership or audience. These discussions are not directly contradictory so much as differing in their presuppositions and purposes, al-Ghazālī advancing Sufi theories in some works, non-Sufi theories in others. Even within his non-Sufi theorising there is a diversity reflecting the different contexts and genres of the works. While *Fayṣal* argues for latitude in interpretation, *Mustaṣfā* argues for caution. Al-Ghazālī's Sufi hermeneutical theories show greater consistency, with the exception of *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id,* as previously mentioned. This lack of a comprehensive theory should come as no surprise, however. Any reliance on spiritual insights to guide interpretation, an approach alGhazālī often mentions, is not going to be guided by a formal method, as recently noted by Esack (2002:140).

Al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical practice exhibits similar diversity. He can focus his interpretations on a range of theological interests, or on a single issue, such as logic. A verse can be interpreted in strikingly different ways, notably Q7:200 on *dhikr,* which he interprets in different texts alternatively as a reference to Sufi practice or to syllogistic logic. Again, this is unsurprising given the varying goals and approaches in al-Ghazālī's writing.

Influences on al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics are various. In particular, this study has drawn attention to interaction with the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', and, at a more pervasive level of influence, the thought of Ibn Sīnā. This is particularly clear in *Mishkāt,* but while the full flowering of this influence occurs here, its seeds are in evidence in earlier works. Hence, hermeneutics provides another dimension to the complex engagement of al-Ghazālī with Ibn Sīnā, the figure who is both his opponent, and yet in some respects also his mentor. Gutas's remark that, in relation to logic, al-Ghazālī was Ibn Sīnā's 'collaborator and mouthpiece' (Gutas 1988:284) is also partly applicable to *Mishkāt*. However, Frank's revisionist conclusions regarding al-Ghazālī's alleged departures from Ash'arism in favour of Ibn Sīnā's views on causality cannot be confirmed in the light of the preceding study. While it can be argued that *Fayṣal* contains a response to unspecified criticisms of al-Ghazālī's departures from Ash'arite thought, al-Ghazālī's discussions and use of *ta'wīl* in this and other works do not provide clear evidence for Frank's belief in al-Ghazālī's acceptance of determined causality

Another aspect of al-Ghazālī's Sufi theories of *ta'wīl* is their dependence on his bi-partite cosmology This is not a complex cosmology in the way al-Ghazālī uses it in support of his hermeneutical understanding, but it is significant in positing the interdependence of the visible and invisible realms as a justification for approaching the text of the Qur'an on two levels simultaneously. Lazarus-Yafeh (1975:503) is therefore

correct in drawing attention to the importance of cosmology for al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic hermeneutics in its more Sufi manifestations.

The introduction to the present work noted that al-Ghazālī, unsurprisingly, affirms the idea of an authoritative text and authorial intention. This differs from recent ideas in philosophical hermeneutics claiming that any interpreter inevitably produces meaning, and that there is no fixed meaning to a text existing independently of interpreters. It can be assumed that al-Ghazālī would be a staunch opponent of such a view. However, this study has shown that in fact he could be said to be a prime example of an interpreter producing meaning. Al-Ghazālī's context, it could be argued, led him to find his theological concerns in the Qur'an, in *Jawāhir,* and to find syllogistic logic and Ibn Sīnā's analysis of the Light Verse as well. However, as previously noted, an appeal to spiritual or hidden meanings as the justification for particular interpretations renders it very difficult to exclude any given interpretation as illegitimate. For this reason, if al-Ghazālī's own worldview is adopted, it could be those hidden dimensions, rather than his context and preconditioning, which lead to the uncovering of the meanings he identifies in the Qur'an. The tension between these different explanations of the origins of at least some of his interpretations is probably unresolvable. However, it highlights a fundamental difference between a Sufi belief that contact with a higher power does indeed direct the believer's understanding, and the recent belief that the interpreter's own conscious and sub-conscious ideas play a larger part in guiding the outcome of encounters with the text.

Finally, Rahbar's statement, quoted at the outset of this work, that 'the entire history of Islam is one of exegesis of the Qur'an', can be revisited at this point. How useful has it been to explore al-Ghazālī's works through the filter of his theories and practice of Qur'an interpretation? There is a degree of overstatement in Rahbar's words, but it is certainly the case that al-Ghazālī's complex drawing together of a wide variety of intellectual traditions is highlighted by examining his use of the Qur'an. A study of his Qur'anic hermeneutics enhances the sharpness of the picture of intellectual debts owed, and, more generally, illustrates the way in which apparently unrelated trends can contribute to shaping the ideas of an individual writer. However, it has also become evident that care is needed in drawing conclusions from evidence of borrowing. To identify the origins of an approach to the Qur'an is not necessarily fully to explain that approach, as the discussion of al-Ghazālī's reliance on Ibn Sīnā's interpretation of the Light Verse in Chapter 6 showed.

Al-Ghazālī's well-known elusiveness is also evident in his discussion of the Qur'an. He can no more be tied to one stance on hermeneutical issues than on other questions which scholars debate in relation to his work. The Qur'anic filter has also emphasised his well-known preoccupation with the attainment of certain knowledge, thus providing further evidence that the Qur'an will tend to be employed as a guarantee of the genuinely Islamic nature of ideas at the centre of a Muslim theologian's concerns.

Leading on from the present study, more exploration of the influences on al-Ghazālī's writing would be valuable in view of the sometimes surprising influences discussed earlier, notably the shadow of Ibn Sīnā which falls across al-Ghazālī's work. Another

obvious area is the Qur'anic interpretations to be found in the *Iḥyā'* taken as a whole. These invite study so as to compare and contrast them with the material analysed here. A further potentially significant line of enquiry is the influences of al-Ghazālī's use of the Qur'an on subsequent thinkers, influences in which he was perhaps a link in a chain reaching back before him. In closing, this much can be said: studying al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic hermeneutics encapsulates many of his core concerns despite the fact that he is not best known as an interpreter of the Qur'an.

Notes

Introduction

1 Griffel (2000:334) accepts *Qānūn* as genuine. Questions of authenticity concerning works attributed to al-Ghazālī frequently arise in discussions of individual works. Two recent studies of particular works are Pourjavady (2002) and Griffel (2006). For general treatment of the issue see Watt (1952:24–45), and Lazarus-Yafeh (1975:249–63).

2 This translation of the title is taken from *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (X:359) The title literally means 'The Quintessence of the Science of [legal] Principles.'

3 The literature on hermeneutics in general is of course vast. For a helpful summary of these ways, see Palmer (1981:15–38).

4 Corbin (1960:30) objects to the use of 'allegory' in connection with *ta'wil* since he regards this as denoting an arbitrary sign, preferring 'symbol', which is 'the unique expression of the thing symbolized'.

5 Named after Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935), Ash'arite thought characteristically stresses the absolute power and will of God, such that the only definition of good is what God wills, and that since God's power is all-pervasive, only God, rather than human beings, is the true agent of every action. Recent questions over how far al-Ghazālī's ideas reflect Ash'arite thought are discussed in the course of this study.

6 On the translation of the term *'munqidh'* as 'deliverer' rather than 'deliverance', see Wickens (1989:371).

7 There is increasing discussion of Ibn Sīnā's influence on subsequent writers more generally; see, for example, Wisnovsky (2004).

1
'The activities of this world' (I): *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna'l-Islām wa'l-zandaqa*

1 For a recent discussion of this work see Mitha (2001).

2 A long excursus by the editor of the Arabic edition explains the apparent jump in page numbers from the previous chapter of the Arabic text.

3 Jackson, in the notes to his translation, provides full references for these hadiths.

4 For comment on Ḥanbalīs who were open to some use of *ta'wīl* see Swartz (2002:61).

5 What al-Ghazālī understands by *burhān* is discussed later. Griffel (2000:300) argues that al-Ghazālī means by *burhān* only 'argument', rather than decisive, that is, demonstrative or apodeictic proof. See however the review of Griffel's work by Janssens (2003:71) for a counter argument in favour of the usual interpretation of *burhān*.

6 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.'

7 Weiss (1985) discusses al-Ghazālī's coverage of the issues relating to *tawātur* and the possibility of certain knowledge, as they are presented in *Mustasfā*.

8 This view is defended in *Mustasfā* (I:63–5); translation in Reinhart (1995:101–4).

9 Emanationist cosmology assumes that the universe is generated by God through a series of spiritual entities, the first of which is derived directly from God. They act as intermediaries between God and the material world, so that the idea of God is not sullied by too close an association with the base realm of matter. Another implication is that the world is not created because of God's creative will but by processes which, once set in motion, unfold inexorably. For more on this see Chapter 3.
10 For discussion of this passage see Whittingham (2005).
11 Goodman (1978:83–120) and Abrahamov (1988:75–98) deny that al-Ghazālī consistently held to Ash'arī occasionalism. Leaman (1996:17–27) however, contends that while al-Ghazālī utilises the language of his opponents the philosophers, he does not adopt their conceptual framework.
12 *Mustaṣfā* (I:21–2), where the four categories are, 'first, reality in itself *(ḥaqīqatuhu fī nafsihi),* secondly, the establishment of the reality of images in the mind *(thubūt mithāl ḥaqīqatuhu fī'l dhihn)*...thirdly, the production of the sound in letters *(ta'līf ṣūt biḥurūf)*...fourthly, the production of writing *(ta'līf ruqūm)*'.
13 On the date *Mustaṣfā* of see Chapter 2 of the present work.

2
'The activities of this world' (II): *Al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl*

1 Hammad includes a translation of all introductory material in *Mustaṣfā* except the section on logic, and of the first two of the four parts or *quṭbs* into which the work is divided (see bibliography under *Mustaṣfā* The passage on *ta'wīl* discussed here occurs in the third *quṭb.* When two page references are given for *Mustaṣfā,* the second refers to Hammad's translation. Reinhart (1995:87–104) translates *Mustaṣfā,* I:55–65, the opening of the first *quṭb.Mustaṣfā* has generated little recent scholarship in European languages. There is no published study exclusively devoted to it, but discussions occasionally occur within works on wider themes. Bello (1989:29–43) discusses its treatment of *ijmā'* (consensus). Laoust (1958:152–83) offers a brief survey of the teaching of *Mustaṣfā* on a range of topics, including the sources of the law, its interpretation and the nature of *ijtihād*. Weiss (1985) discusses the treatment of recurrent transmission *(tawātur)* while Hammad (1987) examines its discussion of legal rules *(aḥkām).* Griffel (2002) discusses Ibn Rushd's response to the work.
2 For a general introduction to al-Ghazālī as a jurist, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* X:372–4.
3 Hourani judges that the writing of *Munqidh* and *Mustaṣfā* probably overlaps, *Munqidh* being completed first. See also Bouyges (1959:73–5).
4 On the *qarīna* see Hallaq (1988:475–80). A *qarīna* can take the form of words in the text itself which indicate the way in which another word is to be understood, or 'extra-linguistic circumstances surrounding the verbal usage' (1988:476) which qualify or clarify the meaning of a term or command.
5 See Griffel (2002:59) on how Ibn Rushd misrepresents this position of al-Ghazālī.
6 See Heinrichs (1992:263–6) for a selection of treatments of this Qur'anic phrase in relation to the concept of *majāz*.
7 Al-Āmidī also criticises al-Ghazālī's discussion of *ta'wīl* on two other points. It does not include *ta'wīl* based on certain rather than probable factors, nor does it make clear that it refers to valid *ta'wīl* rather than *ta'wīl* in general (Weiss 1992:473–4).

3
'The activities of the hereafter': four texts defending Sufi approaches to the Qur'an

1 This translation is suggested by Najjar in the introduction to his translation of *Kashf* (Ibn Rushd 1998: tr. 2001:2).
2 For this hadith see al-Tirmidhi (1972:IV:268). It is discussed by Speight (1988:66–8).
3 Ibn 'Abbās was a young companion of Muhammad, being fourteen when the Prophet died. He became known as a repository of reports on Qur'an interpretation. See (EI2:I:19–20).
4 These veils are: first, an unhelpful pre-occupation with exact pronunciation, second, unthinking adherence to a particular school of thought without spiritual insight, third, falling victim to pride and human passions (in al-Ghazālī's view the most common veil) and, fourth, the belief that the only legitimate exegesis is exoteric exegesis passed on by early exegetical authorities.
5 For hadith reference see note 2.
6 On Ibn Mas'ūd see EI2:III:873–5.
7 A discussion of *hawā* in the context of *ra'y* is given by Kamali (1990:56–7), who discusses *ra'y* from a legal perspective.
8 These linguistic phenomena are: first, 'conciseness by omission and suppression of words' *(al-ījāz bi 'l-ḥadhf wa 'l-iḍmar),* second, 'inversion' *(al-manqūl al-munqalib),* third, 'repetition which breaks the connection of speech' *(al-mukarrar al-qāṭi' li-waṣl al-kalām),* fourth, 'the occurrence of a word before or after its proper place' *(al-muqaddam wa'l-mu'akhir),* fifth, 'ambiguous expression' *(mubham)* and sixth, 'progression in exposition' *(al-tadrīj fi'l-bayān),* by which al-Ghazālī means details being added later in the Qur'an to an initial statement.
9 Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1990:336–7) objects that al-Ghazālī's use of terms such as jewels and pearls encourages an approach to the Qur'anic text which treats it as a precious object to be revered rather than understood, and as a promise of future hope which undermines the need to tackle present suffering.
10 Al-Ghazālī discusses these *gharā'ib al-Qur'an* in *Ādāh tilāwat;* see al-Ghazālī (n.d.: I: 292–4; tr. 94–101).
11 *Ma'rifa* is sometimes translated as 'gnosis' but this translation is not entirely appropriate to al-Ghazālī's highly intellectual and schematised expositions of Sufism.
12 Al-Ghazālī (n.d.: I:17–18; tr. 31–3). This classification is based on the four-fold division of sources (uṣūl), branches *(furū')* auxiliary sciences *(muqaddimāt)* and supplementary sciences *(mutammimāt)*. Here 'exposition which rests on authoritative transmission', or exoteric, literal exegesis, is placed in the fourth group.
13 This likely borrowing is noted by Goldziher (1920:199); see Ikhwān (1957:IV, 76–7, and cf. III, 299–300). On the Ikhwān more generally see Netton (1982).
14 While the source of this wording is not known, a similar hadith occurs in Ibn Māja's section of his *Sunan* entitled 'muqaddima' (1972:I:71), beginning, 'His veil is light' instead of 'God has seventy veils of light and darkness.'
15 For this hadith, see Wensinck (ed.) (1933b:1:416).
16 In relation to Moses, the mountain occurs in Q7:143, the fire in Q20:10.
17 For a diagram showing the place of the Active Intellect in the emanationist hierarchy of al-Fārābī, see Netton (1989:116); see ibid., 165, for an equivalent diagram illustrating the thought of Ibn Sīnā. Davidson writes, 'The active intellect, although not powerful enough to emanate an unchanging body, a soul to accompany an unchanging body, and a further eternal incorporeal intelligence, does emanate analogues of the three. It emanates the matter of the sublunar world, natural forms in the sublunar world, and human intelligible thought… The active intellect is, as it were, an eternal cosmic transmitter, broadcasting an undifferentiated

range of forms, as well as the substratum that can receive them, and properly attuned portions of matter automatically receive the natural forms appropriate to them. The active intellect is accordingly called the 'giver of forms'. Matter blended to the highest possible degree of homogeneity receives an incorporeal human soul from the active intellect's emanation' (Davidson 1992:124).

18 Davidson (1992:7) mentions as intellectual predecessors Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus, Themistius and works attributed to John Philoponus. On the influence of the first of these on al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā see Genequand (2001:20–5).

19 For a general account of this type of prophecy see Ibn Sīnā (1959:173–82). For an account of Ibn Sīnā and the Active Intellect, see Davidson (1992), especially 84–7.

20 This is most unlikely to be the same work as that which al-Ghazālī refers to by this title at the end of the first discussion of *Tahāfut* (al-Ghazālī 1997:46). Here he states that he proposes this title for a subsequent work which will affirm beliefs, rather than exclusively discussing views he rejects, as in *Tahāfut*. However, Marmura presents reasons for concluding that the subsequent work referred to in *Tahāfut* turned out to be *Iqtiṣād* (see Marmura's introduction, al-Ghazālī 1997:xxiii–iv).

21 In Sufi parlance, 'state' refers to a fleeting subjective condition of the Sufi, whereas 'station' is the term for a given stage in the Sufi path, such as love or certainty.

22 For an overview of these and other related topics see Smith and Haddad (2002).

23 The hadiths are as follows: 'The Black Stone is the right hand of God in the earth'; 'The heart of the believer lies between two of the fingers of the Merciful' and 'Verily I shall find the soul of the Merciful from the direction of al-Yaman.'

24 For al-Ghazālī's disagreement with the philosophers over bodily resurrection in *Tahāfut* see al-Ghazālī (1997:212–29).

4
Sailing to the midst of the fathomless ocean: *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*

1 Strangely, as noted by Welch (1979:274), al-Ghazālī omits from his list of verses containing jewels both the Throne Verse (Q2:255) and Sura 112, passages to which he devotes separate chapters in Part One of *Jawāhir*. He also omits Q1:4–7 from his list of the pearls.

2 Despite promising to interpret Sura 36, al-Ghazālī (1352:38; tr. 65) does not in fact do so. The chapter devoted to this sura (al-Ghazālī 1352:48; tr. 81) simply urges the reader to apply the same principles which al-Ghazālī has set forth in his previous interpretations.

3 Since al-Ghazālī is not a representative of a genuinely gnostic approach the translation of *'ārifūn* as 'those who know' is preferred here. The term will frequently be left in its Arabic form in what follows.

4 Cf. Book XXXV of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd wa'l-Tawakkul* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:245, tr. 25–6) for a longer discussion based on the same understanding of this verse.

5 For a brief description of this interpretation by the *Ikhwān,* see Netton (1982:80–1).

6 The same approach to this Qur'anic passage can be found in the modern age; see the work of the Iranian commentator Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1975:96).

7 In *Kitāb Qawā'id* he also adopts more explicitly the Ikhwān's discussion of souls being like riverbeds in their capacities to receive differing amounts. The foam represents here unbelief and hypocrisy, equivalent to *ḍalāl* in *Jawāhir*.

8 For a brief survey of al-Ghazālī's views on Paradise see also Quasem (1975:153–61).

9 This remark seems double edged in its relationship to the tradition known as Prophetic medicine *(al-ṭibb al-nabawi)*. This tradition advocated medical precepts drawn from the Qur'an and Hadith. While al-Ghazālī's main point is clearly to affirm the Qur'an as a source

of scientific principles, his remark could also be taken as an indirect criticism of the religious rather than medical writers who wrote in the tradition of *al-ṭibb al-nabawī,* since he emphasises the need for detailed medical knowledge for a proper understanding of such texts as he quotes. See *EI (2),* vol. X, 'Tibb', 453.

10 Here al-Ghazālī commends Book XXXVI of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba wa'l-Shawq wa'l-Uns wa'l-Riḍā'* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:286–350).

11 Cf. Q 16:68, 'And your Lord revealed to the bees "Build homes in the mountains, the trees and in what men construct for you"'.

12 Ormsby (1984:45–6) notes that Galen's *De usu partium* was translated into Arabic in the third/ninth century.

13 A theme forming the very last discussion *Iḥyā'*; see al-Ghazālī n.d.: IV:528–32.

14 Al-Ghazālī refers the reader to Book XXVIII of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb Dhamm al-Jāh wa'l-Riyā'* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: III:268–326).

15 Al-Ghazālī adds a cross-reference to Book IX of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb al-Adhkar wa'l-Da'āwāt* (al-Ghazālī n.d.: I:295–333).

16 This balance is also the theme of Book XXXIII of *Iḥyā'*, *Kitāb al-Khawf wa'l-Rajā; Iḥyā'* (al-Ghazali n.d.: IV:138–85).

17 Davidson distinguishes this sense of necessary being from that of 'a being whose existence can be established by a prior, logical necessity'.

18 Shehadi (1964:20–1) lists four respects in which God, for al-Ghazālī, is utterly unique. He is the only one who has any given attribute which he possesses. Second he is necessarily, not accidentally unique. Third, he is absolutely unlike regarding the degree of difference, even in attributes which in verbal form can be applied to God and beings other than God. Fourth, he is absolutely unlike in total nature, that is, the third category, absolute degree of difference, applies to every possible aspect of the Divine being. This summary provides a context for al-Ghazālī's comment at this point in *Jawāhir*. It is linked to his fundamental understanding of God, which is a negative understanding in the sense that nothing can be affirmed of God. Shehadi's study explores some of the implications of this stance.

19 Al-Ghazālī's exposition of *al-'Alī* ('The Exalted') in *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā* (1971a: 115–18; tr. 102–5), concentrates on the meaning of highest as denoting uncaused. He also mentions that the highest being occupies that place necessarily, not simply comparatively. His comments on *al-'Aẓīm* ('The Great') (al-Ghazālī 1971a:112–14; tr. 99–100), define this greatness as that which is inconceivable since it goes beyond every intellectual limit. In sum, al-Ghazālī emphasises that God is uncaused and unknowable.

20 The texts mentioned are Q3:18, Q112, Q3:26–7, Q1, Q59:22–4 and Q57:1–6.

21 The hadith is also recorded by Abū Dawūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Māja and Mālik (see Wensinck 1933b:I:296).

5

Syllogisms as the steps to heaven: *Al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm*

1 *Al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm* (1353/1934) in M.Al-Kurdī (ed.), *al-Jawāhir al-ghawālī min rasā'il al-Imām ḥujjat al-Islām al-Ghazālī,* Cairo: Matba'at al-Sa'āda: 156–203.

2 See also the comments by McCarthy (1980:287) and Madkour (1979:61).

3 As opposed to Ismā'īlīs themselves. As Watt (1963:70–1) notes, most polemic literature is aimed not at adherents of a position, but at those considering adopting it.

4 For a general account of the Ismā‘īlīs, see Daftary (1990). For discussion of the nature of the Saljuq response to their threat during the period in which al-Ghazālī produced most of his writings, see Hillenbrand (1996:205–20).

5 For discussion of an Ismā‘īlī reply to this work, see Corbin (1977:69–98). Landolt (1991:46), comments, however, in relation to *Mishkāt al-anwār,* that ‘There is no escaping the conclusion that if the “Veils-section” is authentic, then Al-Ghazālī must have been far more impressed by the Ismā‘īlī synthesis of Neoplatonic philosophy and Islam, or “reason and revelation,” than he cares to let us know in either the *Mustaẓhirī* or the *Munqidh*’.

6 On *munāẓara* see EI2, VIII:565–8.

7 Janssens (1986:163–7) discusses the dependence *Maqāṣid* on *Dānesh Nāmeh*.

8 Marmura (1975:111) points out that al-Ghazālī does not succeed fully in demonstrating the validity of these claims.

9 For a discussion of the influence of the logical introduction to *Mustasfā* on subsequent jurists see Hallaq (1990:315–58).

10 Marmura (1968:393) notes that one of the main points of *Mi‘yār* is ‘to render Avicennian logic acceptable and palatable to the *Ash‘arites*’. Marmura also shows (1965:183–204) how al-Ghazālī in *Mi‘yār* deals with the apparent tension between accepting demonstration by means of both syllogisms and also occasionalism.

11 Cited by Endress (1990:25–6), who gives references for these works.

12 Gutas (1998:88), who does not cite his source. On al-Kindī in the context of reconciling philosophy and Islam, see also Endress (1990:4–13).

13 Chejne (1984:57–72) includes a summary of Ibn Ḥazm's text. For a similar account see Chejne (1982:157ff).

14 Margoliouth (1905:79–129) includes the Arabic text and English translation of the debate, taken from Yāqūt’s slightly abridged account in his *Biographical Dictionary*. The reference to *mīzān* occurs on p. 93 (Arabic), p. 112 (English).

15 See Gutas (1988:267–85) for a discussion of the significance of the naming of disciplines in medieval Islam.

16 The following summary draws on Lameer (1994:65–9).

17 Al-Ghazālī in *Maqāṣid* (1912:29) uses the terms *iqtirānī* and *istithnā’ī.*

18 A presentation of all fourteen moods can be found in Lameer (1994:68–70), from which summaries of individual moods are taken in what follows. However, where Lameer follows Aristotle in placing the predicate before the subject in his summaries, the ensuing discussion reverses this in accord with al-Ghazālī’s presentation of the syllogism. The present discussion, following Lameer (1994:66), also employs the Aristotelian set of letters designating terms.

19 Al-Ghazālī’s explanation of the logical principle of the first figure is found in the subsequent chapter (al-Ghazālī 1353:168; tr. 298).

20 All Qur’anic quotations in this section are taken from McCarthy’s translation *Qisṭās*, so as to conform to the terminology of his translations of al-Ghazālī’s syllogisms, based on these same verses. Verse numbering remains that of Fakhry.

21 McCarthy (1980:294) notes that in this second syllogism the first and second premises should be reversed, since the first should be universal, the second affirmative; cf. Stebbing (1930:87) for discussion of this rule. However, the order in which the premises occur does not affect the validity of the argument (Lameer 1994:69).

22 The name of this and the mode *tollendo ponens* (see later) derive from the Latin verbs *tollere* (‘to deny’) and *ponere* (‘to assert’) (Stebbing 1930:104).

23 Al-Ghazālī's account of false syllogisms in the subsequent chapter does not form part of this study. While the account discusses the Qur'an, it does not represent how al-Ghazālī himself interprets the text, but only how it should evidently not be interpreted. His examples of contradiction in false syllogisms are obvious in the extreme and reveal nothing regarding trends in his thought.

24 Fakhry translates these two verses differently, rendering Q26:182 as 'weigh with the just scales', although the Arabic is identical. All three verses discussed in this paragraph occur in *Qisṭās* (al-Ghazālī 1353:157–8; tr. 288–9).

25 Ibn Sīrīn (34–110/654–728) was held from the third/ninth century onwards to be a prominent interpreter of dreams in the early period of Islam; see 'Ibn Sīrīn', EI2:III: 947–8.

26 I translate *mawāzīn* as 'balances' rather than McCarthy's 'principles', so as to make clear the point that syllogisms form the steps on the ascent.

27 A translation of this passage can be found in al-Suyūṭī's abridgement of Ibn Taymiyya's work, *Jahd al-qarīḥa fī tajrīd al-naṣīḥa* (al-Suyūṭī 1993:162). Ibn Taymiyya's other two objections are that the earliest Muslims knew nothing of Greek logic, and that many Muslim scholars criticised this logic once it became prevalent.

6
The coherence of the philosopher: *Mishkāt al-anwār*

1 Another recent attempt to characterise mysticism, this time defined in contrast to asceticism, comes from Melchert (1996:51–70). He identifies as distinctively mystical the notions of communion with an immanent God, a conception of divinity as diffuse, rather than clearly personal, and confidence in God's abundant grace.

2 For partial definitions by early Sufis see Nicholson (1906:303–48).

3 Goodman (1992:39–40). Davidson (1992:6) likewise rules out an esoteric Oriental philosophy in Ibn Sīnā. For a different view, see Nasr (1996:247–51). Nasr equates this 'Oriental Philosophy' with passages such as the ninth section of *Ishārāt,* to be discussed later.

4 For a full description of the sequence of emanation, including the view that the First Intelligence emanates the soul and body of the outermost sphere, see Davidson (1992:75).

5 This image of the mirror is drawn from Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.4.10, cited by Davidson (1992:25). Al-Ghazālī's frequent use of this image as a portrayal of the human heart before God is well known.

6 Another term drawn from Plotinus, this time *Enneads,* V 3.17, VI 9.11, cited by Goodman (1992:181).

7 Goodman (1992:166–7). Davidson (1992:10) contends that such conjunction has no mystical content, a point discussed later.

8 For a detailed discussion of these terms see Davidson (1992:74–112), especially 84–7 and 94.

9 Ibn Sīnā takes the term from Alexander of Aphrodisias; see Davidson (1992:10).

10 This definition corresponds to Aristotle (1984:40).

11 Gutas (1988:166) notes that the equation of *ḥads* with Aristotle's *anchinoia* ('acumen'), made by Goichon and Rahman, is incorrect. Davidson (1992:99) gives references for Aristotle's use of the term *eustochia*. Gutas (1988:159–77) translates and discusses an extensive selection of Ibn Sīnā's discussions of *ḥads*. The phrase 'more spontaneous' used earlier is preferable to simply 'spontaneous' given Ibn Sīnā's differing descriptions of *ḥads*, some of which depict it as gradual rather than as an instantaneous moment of realisation. Marmura (1991:336) questions Gutas's presentation *ḥads* of as straightforwardly

spontaneous reception. Ibn Sīnā, in Discussion 467 from *Mubāḥathāt* (Ibn Sīnā 1947: 231–2) mentions a lesser form of *ḥads* in which the intelligible is received with difficulty, only after reflection *(fikra)* has taken place. Yet Discussion 468 appears to say that an intelligible received after reflection is not intuited.

12 Fakhry (1971:193–207), argues that Ibn Sīnā's mysticism is characterised by the goal of conjunction with a subordinate entity (the active intellect) rather than vision of or union with God himself. This leads him to regard Ibn Sīnā's philosophical mysticism as humanist (1971:202–3). Goodman, however (1992:166), believes that in regard to *wuṣūl*, in the ninth section of *Ishārāt,* Ibn Sīnā has God, not the active intellect, in view.

13 Marmura (1991:342) calls this omission in the discussion of Gutas (1988) 'a basic methodological flaw'.

14 'If the idea of God is not to remain an opaque virtuality, it must be the object of thoughts which a syllogism merely frames and to which a progression merely points the way, but which are grasped not discursively at all but in a pure intuition, the very intuition that orients any such progression and anchors any such syllogism. An irenic stance, then, is more fruitful than the polemical or dismissive: Rationalism, as Plato understood, must fuse with mysticism, linking the processes of dialectic and experience itself with the pure intuition of reason. Reasoning will validate and describe, sensory and emotional experience will hint and lead the way to what pure rational intuition reveals directly, seemingly timelessly—not by the invasion of eternity by human temporal consciousness, nor even by the viewing of eternity from afar, but by *the incorporation in our very temporal awareness and discursive reasoning of a priori elements* whose operations we can understand only by reference to the eternal and absolute' (Goodman 1992:124, emphasis added).

15 Al-Ghazālī links the niche with two different terms in his two descriptions, both of which are therefore given in Table 6.2.

16 This verse reads, 'That is how We revealed to you a Spirit by Our Command. You did not know what the Book is nor what is Belief; but We made it a light, by which We guide whomever We wish of Our servants. You will surely guide unto a Straight Path.' See al-Ghazālī (1998:37).

17 There appears to be a typographical error in Abrahamov (1993:164 n. 106), where it is stated that *al-rūḥ al-mufakkira* refers to the fifth of al-Ghazālī's human spirits. The text should presumably read 'fourth', as stated in Abrahamov (1991:10), where the same point is made.

18 Abrahamov here follows the views of Strauss (1952). Seven arguments in favour of the view that a hidden message might be concealed by disorderly presentation in some medieval Islamic texts are concisely summarised by Hourani (1966:46–7). This approach has, however, also been severely criticised, for example in Leaman (1985:182–201).

19 Jabre (1958:263) also draws attention to this passage.

20 Davidson (1992:153) argues that in *Tahāfut* al-Ghazālī rejects Ibn Sīnā's emanationist explanation of the structure of the universe, but not the structure itself.

21 Abrahamov (1993:159–6) draws attention to this passage in the course of a separate discussion. Burrell and Daher, in their notes to their translation of *Maqsad* (186, n. 33), regard this passage as non-emanationist.

22 Davidson (1992:86) notes that Ibn Sīnā uses the term 'acquired intellect' in two different ways. It can mean any human thought, or alternatively the high point of the intellectual process, as it does in al-Fārābī. In *Ishārāt* the second usage is in view.

23 As previously noted, it is arguable that Ibn Sīnā goes beyond his own usual model in the later stages of *Ishārāt,* in describing the progress of the *'ārif.* However, Abrahamov does not have this point in view in his argument.

24 Again it is possible to find echoes of Ibn Sīnā in al-Ghazālī's writing. Gutas (1988:196) contends that Ibn Sīnā's main concern in his autobiography is to emphasise the importance

of his personal verification *(taḥqīq)* of truth through perceiving the middle term, and so stress his avoidance of *taqlīd*. Thus Ibn Sīnā's purpose in the autobiography is to highlight his 'central epistemological theory', and the fact that he developed it independently of any school of thought. Frank (1992:10) suggests that al-Ghazālī might have written *Munqidh* partly as a response to Ibn Sīnā's autobiography. *Munqidh* also concerns the attainment of personal verification of truth independent of any school of thought, and the concomitant denigration of *taqlīd*. It is clear from *Munqidh* that al-Ghazālī knew Ibn Sīnā's autobiography (al-Ghazālī 1959:48; tr. 105). However, there are other suggestions for precedents for *Munqidh*. Smith (1936:65) argues for the influence al-Muḥāsibī's of *Kitāb al-Waṣāya,* some of which she translates (Smith 1935:18–20). By contrast, van Ess (1987:65–7) identifies Umar al-Khayyam, author of the famous collection of quatrains known as the *Rubayyat,* as a possible predecessor since he, like al-Ghazālī, also wrote a work identifying theology, philosophy, Ismā'īlī thought and Sufism as four possible paths to knowledge.

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